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GOVINDA SÁMANTA.

VOL. I.



GOVINDA SÁMANTA,

OR

THE HISTORY OF A BENGAL RÁIYAT.

BY

THE REV. LÁL BEHÁRI DAY,

CHINSURAH, BENGAL.

Let not ambition mock their useful toil,
Their homely joys, and destiny obscure ;
Nor grandeur hear with a disdainful smile
The short and simple annals of the poor.—*Gray.*

VOL I.

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CHARLES DICKENS AND EVANS,
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TO

BABOO JOY KISSEN MOOKERJEA,

ONE OF THE MOST ENLIGHTENED ZEMINDARS IN BENGAL,

AND

THE DONOR OF THE PRIZE OBTAINED BY THE FOLLOWING PAGES,

THIS LITTLE BOOK

Is Inscribed,

WITH SENTIMENTS OF ESTEEM AND REGARD,

BY THE AUTHOR.

PREFACE.

EARLY in the year 1871 Baboo Joy Kissen Mookerjea, of Uttarapara, a zemindar in Bengal, offered a prize of £50 for the best novel, to be written either in Bengali or in English, illustrating the "Social and Domestic Life of the Rural Population and Working Classes of Bengal." The essays were sent in to the adjudicators early in 1872; but, owing to the absence of two of the adjudicators in England, and to other causes, the award was not made till about the middle of 1874, when the following pages, written in English, obtained the prize. It is proper to state that the original book, to which the prize was adjudged, wanted the last three chapters; these chapters have now been added, in order to bring down the narrative to the present day.

I cannot let this book go to the world without

PREFACE.

expressing the obligations I am under to several English gentlemen who have taken an interest in its publication. First of all, I have to thank Mr. Gordon Robb, of Messrs. G. C. Hay and Co., of Calcutta, for taking a kindly interest in the book, and putting me in the way of the publishers. I have to thank Dr. George Smith, lately editor of the *Friend of India*, and now editor of the *Edinburgh Daily Review*, for reading the book in manuscript, and expressing a favourable opinion of it. I have to thank the Honourable J. B. Phear, one of Her Majesty's Judges in the High Court of Judicature in Calcutta, for not only reading the manuscript, but proposing verbal alterations and suggesting other changes. And last of all, I have to thank Professor E. B. Cowell, of Cambridge, for revising the proof-sheets, and for bringing to bear upon the book his ripe scholarship, his sound judgment, and his fine taste.

LAL BEHARI DAY.

*Hooghly College, Chinsurah,
November 27th, 1874.*

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GOVINDA SÁMANTA.

CHAPTER I.

PREMISES WHAT THE READER IS TO EXPECT, AND WHAT
HE IS NOT TO EXPECT, IN THIS AUTHENTIC HISTORY.

The village life, and every care that reigns
O'er youthful peasants and declining swains ;
What labour yields, and what, that labour past,
Age, in its hour of languor, finds at last ;
What form the real picture of the poor,
Demand a song—the Muse can give no more.

Crabbe.

GENTLE READER, in case you have come with great expectations to the perusal of this humble performance, I deem it proper to undeceive you at the very outset ; lest after going through it, or through a good bit of it, you are disappointed, and then turn round and abuse me as a fellow who, with a view to attract customers, has put a misleading sign-board over the door of his shop. I therefore

purpose, like a tradesman who, though anxious to turn a penny, wishes to obtain it in an honest way, to tell you at once, in all sincerity and good faith, what you are to expect, and what you are not to expect, in this hall of refreshment; so that after being acquainted with the bill of fare, you may either begin to partake of the repast or not, just as you please, and thus save yourself the trouble of sitting down to a dinner not congenial to your taste, and me the abuse justly merited by a man who holds out expectations which he cannot fulfil: and, after the approved manner of the popular preachers of the day, I shall treat first of the second point. The first head, then, of this preliminary discourse, or—to use a still more learned word—of this prolegomenon, is what the schoolmen would call the negative point, namely, what you are not to expect in this book.

And *firstly*, of the first point. You are not to expect anything marvellous or wonderful in this little book. My great Indian predecessors—the latchet of whose shoes I do not pretend to be worthy to unloose—Vālmiki, Vyās, and the compilers

of the Puránas, have treated of kings with ten heads and twenty arms; of a monkey carrying the sun in his arm-pit; of demons churning the universal ocean with a mountain for a churn-staff; of beings, man above and fish below, or with the body of a man and the head of an elephant; of sages, with truly profound stomachs, who drank up the waters of the ocean in one sip; of heroes as tall as the lofty towers of the golden Lanká; of whole regions inhabited by rational snakes, having their snake-kings, snake-ministers, snake-soldiers hissing and rushing forth to battle. And some of my European predecessors, like Swift and Rabelais, have spoken of men whose pockets were capacious enough to hold a whole nation of diminutive human beings; and of giants, under whose tongue a whole army, with its park of artillery, its pontoón bridges, its commissariat stores, its ambulance, its field post, its field telegraph, might take shelter from the pouring rain and the pitiless storm, and bivouac with security under its fleshy canopy. Such marvels, my reader, you are not to expect in this unpretending volume. The age of marvels has gone by; giants do not pay

now-a-days ; scepticism is the order of the day ; and the veriest stripling, whose throat is still full of his mother's milk, says to his father, when a story is told him : " Papa, is that true ? "

Secondly, you are not to expect in this authentic history any thrilling incidents. Romantic adventures, intricate evolutions of the plot, striking occurrences, remarkable surprises, hair-breadth escapes, scenes of horror, at the recital of which the hair stands on end—the stuff of which the sensational novels of the day are made—have no place here. Thrilling incidents occur but seldom in the life-history of ninety-nine persons out of a hundred, and in that of most Bengal ráiyats never. If you, gentle reader, choose to come in here, you must make up your mind to go without romantic adventures and the like ; and, as for horrors, this country inn has not the means to make you sup off them.

Thirdly, you are not to expect any love-scenes. The English reader will be surprised to hear this. In his opinion there can be no novel without love-scenes. A novel without love is to him the play of Hamlet, with Hamlet's part left out. But I

cannot help it. I would fain introduce love-scenes; but in Bengal—and for the matter of that in all India—they do not make love in the English and honourable sense of that word. Unlike the butterfly, whose courtship, Darwin assures us, is a very long affair, the Bengali does not court at all. Marriage is an affair managed entirely by the parents and guardians of bachelors and spinsters, coupled with the good offices of a professional person, whom the reader may meet with in the course of this narrative. Of dishonourable, criminal love, there is no lack; but I do not intend to pollute these pages with its description.

Fourthly, You are not to expect here “grandiloquent phraseology and gorgeous metaphors.” Some of my educated countrymen are in love with sonorous language. The use of English words two or three feet long is now the reigning fashion in Calcutta. Young Bengal is a literary Bombastes Furioso; and Young Bengalese is Johnsonese run mad. “Big thinkers may require,” as old Sam Johnson said, “big words;” but we, plain country-folk, talking of fields, of paddy, of the plough and the harrow, have no sublime thoughts, and do not, therefore,

require sublime words. If, gentle reader, you have a taste for highly-wrought, highly-seasoned language, for gorgeous similes, for sesquipedalian phraseology, for sonorous expression, making a maximum of noise with a minimum of sense, and for such other comfits, I advise you to go elsewhere and not to come to this country confectionery.

I now come to the second point of this preliminary discourse, which is, what the reader *is* to expect in this book. Remembering that brevity is the soul of wit, I despatch this part of the subject in one short sentence. The reader is to expect here a plain and unvarnished tale of a plain peasant, living in this plain country of Bengal—I beg the pardon of that sublime poet who sung in former days of the “hills of Hooghly and the mountains of the Twenty-four Parganás”—told in a plain manner. Such, gentle reader, is my bill of fare. If you think it will suit you, I bid you welcome; if not, please pass on to some other quarter.

CHAPTER II.

INTRODUCES AN OLD WOMAN TO THE READER.

Sche cowde moche of wandryng by the weye,
Gat-tothed was sche, sothly for to seye.

Prologue to Canterbury Tales.

It was considerably past midnight one morning in the sultry month of April, when a human figure was seen moving in a street of Kánchanpur, a village about six miles to the north-east of the town of Vardhamána, or Burdwán. There was no moon in the heavens, as she had already disappeared behind the trees on the western skirts of the village; but the sky was lit up with myriads of stars, which were regarded with superstitious awe by our nocturnal pedestrian, as if they were the bright eyes of men who once lived on the earth, and had since passed into the realms of Indra. Perfect stillness reigned everywhere,

except when it was interrupted by the barking of dogs, or the yells of the village watchmen, two or three of whom often join in a chorus, and send forth those unearthly shouts which so often disturb the sleep of the peaceful inhabitants. The human figure, which was moving with rapid strides, had no other clothing than a *dhuti*, wrapped round the waist, and descending to the knee-joints; and he had a thick bamboo-stick in his hand. As he was rounding a corner of the street, he saw dimly a man sitting at the door of a hut, who shouted out—

“Who goes there?”

“I am a ráiyat,” exclaimed the moving figure.

“What ráiyat?” rejoined the village watchman, for it was none other.

“I am Mánik Sámanta,” was the reply.

“Mánik Sámanta, at this late hour!” said the watchman.

“I am going to fetch Rupá’s mother.”

“Oh! I understand: come, sit down and smoke—tobacco is ready.”

“You smoke—I am in haste!”

So saying, Mánik Sámanta walked on faster than

before, passed that part of the street which was lined on both sides with houses, and came to the outskirts of the village, where there were a great many mango orchards, sprinkled here and there with a few huts.

Before one of those huts Mánik stood and called out: "Rupá's mother! Rupá's mother!" At the first call Mánik perceived, from whispers inside the hut, that Rupá's mother was awake; but he received no answer to his call. He called a second time, but no answer was returned; he called a third time, no answer yet. It was only after he had bawled out the fourth time that the call was responded to. The reader may suppose that Rupá's mother was deaf; but it was not so. She had a meaning in not answering the call till it was repeated the fourth time. It is the invariable custom of the rural population of Bengal never to respond to a call at night, especially after midnight, till it is repeated three times. It is believed that *Nisi*, that is Night personified, has often stood at night at the doors of simple folk, called them out of their beds, and decoyed them to pools and tanks, where they were drowned.

The sable goddess never calls, it is believed, more than three times; and in order to be sure that it is the voice of a human being, and not of *Nisi*, no answer is given till after the fourth time. The superstition has doubtless its origin in the perils incurred by those who are afflicted with somnambulism. But to proceed with the narrative. The door was opened. Mánik told Rupá's mother that she was wanted immediately. Rupá's mother told Rupá, her daughter, to strike a light. Rupá brought from a corner a small gunny bag, and poured out its contents, which were two or three pieces of flint, an iron striker, and some pieces of *solú*, the Indian cork-plant. In a moment the flint gave out a spark of fire, which fell into the *solú*; the sulphur match was applied; and an earthen lamp, containing a small quantity of mustard oil and a cotton wick, was lit.

Let us take a hasty glance, by the dim light of the lamp, at Rupá's mother and her hut. On the floor of the hut, surrounded on all sides by mud walls and over-topped by a straw thatch, lay a coarse mat of palmyra-leaves, which served as a bed for the mother and the daughter. In the four corners were

some *húndis* (earthen pots) which contained all their stores, consisting chiefly of rice, a few vegetables, and some culinary condiments like turmeric, salt, mustard oil and the like. There was no furniture. Rupá's mother, who was of the *bígdi* caste, appeared to be a woman of between forty and fifty years of age, of rather below the average height of Bengali women, and had a slender figure;—indeed, her limbs seemed to be as thin and shrivelled as the dry stalks of the lotos. For some reason or other she had very few teeth in her head, and those few at a great distance from one another; in consequence of which she spoke like a woman eighty years old. We have used the circumlocutory phrase, Rupá's mother, instead of mentioning her own name; but the fact is, we never heard her name mentioned by anybody in the village; and though we have made laborious inquiries into the matter, our exertions have proved fruitless,—every one insisting on calling her Rupá's mother. Rupá herself appeared to be a young woman about twenty years old, and the fact that she had not on her wrist the usual iron circlet, nor the vermilion paint on the top of her forehead,

where the hair was parted, showed that she was a widow.

Rupá's mother had no great preparations to make for accompanying Mánik. She had no bundles to make up of her clothes, for she usually carried about with her on her person the whole of her wardrobe, which consisted of one long *sári* and one short one; the latter of which she put on every day after bathing, while the former one was being sunned, and both of which she used to whiten once a month by steeping them in a solution of ashes and *cows' urine*—the cheap soap of the peasantry of Bengal. She uncovered one of the *hínḍis*, took out some drugs, put out the light, and ordered Rupá to lock the door and follow her. But as Rupá was putting the padlock on the door, a lizard, which was resting on the eaves of the thatch, chirped. The *tik, tik, tik*, of the lizard is always regarded as a bad omen by all classes of the people of Bengal, so the journey was delayed. The door was re-opened, the lamp was again lit, and they sat for half an hour in pensive meditation, though Mánik vented no little wrath against the audacious reptile. At last, however,

they set out. They went the same way through which Mánik had come, went nearly to the middle of the village, and entered a house. By this time the stars had disappeared from the heavens, excepting the kingly *Sukra* (or regent of the planet Venus), which was shining above the eastern horizon, and proclaiming to an awakening world the cheerful approach of day.

As I already perceive people passing in the street, smoking as they are walking on, and coughing over their hookahs, I do not intend going into the house into which Mánik and the two women have just entered, but purpose taking a stroll through the village, and trust my reader will give me the pleasure of his company.

CHAPTER III.

SKETCHES A VILLAGE IN BENGAL.

Sweet Auburn ! loveliest village of the plain,
Where health and plenty cheer'd the labouring swain.

The Deserted Village.

KANCHANPUR, or the Golden City, is a considerable village in Parganá Sáhábád, in the district of Vardhamána, and lies about six miles to the north-east of the town of that name. It has a population of about fifteen hundred souls, belonging to most of the thirty-six castes into which the Hindus of Bengal are generally divided, though the predominating caste in the village was the *sadyoga*, or the agricultural class. Why the village has obtained the name of the “golden city,” I have not been able exactly to ascertain ; some of the oldest inhabitants maintain that it has been so called on account of the wealth

accumulated, and comforts enjoyed by the peasantry in general; while others are of the opinion that the village has been called "golden," on account of the residence in it of some rich families of the *suvarnavanikas* (literally, traders in gold), usually called the banker caste. However this may be, Káncanpur is a large and prosperous village. There is a considerable Bráhmāna population, the great majority of whom are of the *srotriya* order, often called *rúdhī*, from the fact of their living in *Rúdh*, the name by which the country lying on the western side of the Bhágurathi river is usually designated. The *káyasthas*, or the writer caste, are comparatively few in number. *Ugra-kshatriyas*, or *Aguris*, as they are called in common parlance, who are all engaged in agricultural pursuits, though less numerous than the *sadgopas*, are an influential class in the village; while there is the usual complement of the medical caste, of blacksmiths, barbers, weavers, spice-sellers, oilmen, *bágdīs*, *doms*, *hádīs*, and the rest. Strange to say, there is hardly a single Muhammadan family in the village—the votaries of that faith being less numerous in western than in eastern Bengal.

Kánchaupur, like most villages in Bengal, has four divisions agreeably to the four cardinal points of the compass—the northern, the southern, the eastern, and the western. The village lies north and south, and the northern and southern divisions are much larger than the eastern and western. A large street runs north and south, straight as the crow flies, on which abut smaller streets and lanes from the eastern and western divisions. The bulk of the houses are mud cottages thatched with the straw of paddy, though there is a considerable number of brick houses, owned, for the most part, by the *káyas-thas* and the banker caste. The principal street, of which I have spoken, is lined on both sides by ranges of houses, either of brick or of mud, each having a compound, with at least a tree or two, such as the plum, mango, guava, lime, or papaya, and the invariable plantain. Outside the village, the main street is extended nearly a quarter of a mile at each end, with rows on either side of the magnificent *asvatha*, the *Ficus religiosa* of botanists. In the centre of the village are two temples of Siva, facing each other; one of them

has a large colonnade, or rather polystyle, as there are no less than four rows of columns; and the intervening space between the two temples is planted with the *asvatha*. There are other temples of Siva in other parts of the village, but there is nothing about them worthy of remark. In the central part of each of the four divisions of the village there is a *vakula* tree (*Minusops Elengi*), the foot of which is built round with solid masonry, raised three or four feet above the ground, in the form of a circle, in the centre of which stands the graceful trunk. As the diameter of this circle is seldom less than twelve feet, a good number of people can easily sit on it, and you meet there, of an afternoon, the gentry of the village, squatting on mats or carpets, engaged in discussing village politics, or in playing at cards, dice, or the royal game of chess.

There are not more than half-a-dozen shops in the village; in these are sold rice, salt, mustard, oil, tobacco, and other necessities of Bengali life. The villagers, however, are supplied with vegetables, clothes, cutlery, spices, and a thousand knick-knacks,

twice a-week, from a *hút*, or fair, which is held on Tuesdays and Saturdays, on a plain on the south-western side.

To a person coming towards the village, from whatever point of the compass, Kánchanpur presents a most striking view. In addition to the usual tops of mangoes and clumps of bamboo which skirt most villages in the country, our village is nearly encircled with some of the finest and most picturesque tanks in a district which is noted for its fine and picturesque tanks. These tanks, often covering forty or fifty acres of land, are surrounded by lofty embankments. On these embankments wave hundreds of the stately *tála* (*Borassus flabelliformis*), which look from a distance like so many gigantic warders posted as sentinels on the high battlements of some fortified castle. Two of these tanks are worthy of description. On the south-east skirt of the village lies the *himságara*, or sea of ice, so called from the excessive coldness of its water. It has, like most tanks, two bathing *ghúts*, one for men and the other for women, at a good distance from each other. The steps of the landing-place are made of

marble. At the head of the *ghát*, on either side, is a sacred *tulasi* plant (*Ocimum sanctum*), placed on a high pedestal of masonry; a little higher up stand on two sides two *sriphal* trees (*Ægle Marmelos*), and in front of the *ghát* is a temple containing a statue of Chaitanya, of the size of life. The other tank is called *Krishnaságara*, or the black sea, from the fact of its water appearing black from a distance; indeed, the people say that its water is as black as the eye of a crow. The *gháts* of this great reservoir are not so grand as those of the *himságara*, but it is said to be the deepest tank in the village; indeed, some people believe that it has subterranean communication with *pátála*, or the infernal regions. It is also believed that in the bottom of the tank there are jars of untold treasures, in the shape of gold *mohurs*, in custody of a demon of the *Yaksha* species. The *krishnaságara* is therefore looked upon with mysterious awe. The oldest inhabitant does not remember its having been drained of its fish, the drag-net having been invariably cut on such occasions in the middle of the tank. Scarcely any one bathes in it, though

scores of women may be seen every morning and evening drawing water from it for drinking. As the tank has never been cleansed since it was excavated, it is filled with aquatic plants of a hundred species; yet its water is beautifully transparent, and unquestionably wholesome. The other tanks of the village, though not so large, contain equally good water, and their embankments are all covered, more or less thickly, with the heaven-pointing *tála*, with its long trunk and its leafy crown; while below the embankments, on all sides, are groves of the mango, the tamarind, and the *Kathbel* (*Feronia éléphantum*).

The reader must not suppose that this display of the glories of the vegetable creation is confined to the outskirts of the village. Inside the village, around the homesteads of the people, are to be found innumerable clumps of the bamboo, and trees of every description; while there are not a few gardens in which fruit-trees are carefully tended. In these orchards a cocoa-nut tree may be occasionally seen, but that tree does not take kindly to the soil of Parganá Sáhábád. At Kánchanpur

there are three curiosities of the vegetable kingdom. One is a row of two dozen *palúsa* trees (*Butea frondosa*) in the southern division of the village. When these are in flower, they present a most imposing spectacle. The whole of every tree, branches, trunk and all, becomes covered with gorgeous flowers; and to a spectator looking at them from a distance, it is a truly enchanting vision. The second curiosity is a gigantic *Vakula* tree, which has a leafy circumference of several hundred feet, and which affords shelter every night to thousands of birds. The *Vakula* tree is a great favourite of the people of Bengal; it is one of the most graceful of all trees; it has a small flower of delicate sweetness; and its head, naturally large, is so smooth and rounded in shape that a foreigner would suppose that the pruning-knife had been used. But the remarkable feature of this particular *Vakula* tree is its size. I have not seen its equal in the whole district of Vardhamána. The third curiosity of the vegetable kingdom at Kánchanpur is a magnificent *vata* tree (*Ficus Indica*) which grows near the *hút* to the south-west of the village; it covers many acres of

ground; it has sent forth hundreds of branches downwards, which have taken root in the soil, and become separate trees. It affords not only shelter to thousands of the feathery race at night, but grateful shade at noon to scores of peasant boys tending their cows in the adjacent meadows. Milton must have had one of these trees in his mind's eye when he sang of the big tree which

In Malabar or Deccan spreads her arms
Branching so broad and long, that in the ground
The bended twigs take root, and daughters grow
About the mother-tree, a pillar'd shade
High over-arch'd, and echoing walks between:
There oft the Indian herdsman shunning heat
Shelters in cool, and tends his pasturing herds
At loop-holes cut through thickest shade.

Sir Henry Maine, in his ingenious and thoughtful work entitled "Village Communities in the East and West," adopting the language of the Teutonic township, speaks of three parts of an Indian village:—*first* the village itself or the cluster of homesteads inhabited by the members of the community; *secondly*, the "arable mark" or lands under cultivation surrounding the village; and *thirdly*, the

“common mark,” or waste lands for pasturage. Of the first we have already spoken. The second, or the arable mark, of Káncanpur consists of some thousands of *bighás* of land, encompassing the village, and forming a circle of cultivation the radius of which is about half a mile. Paddy of various kinds is the staple produce of the bulk of the land, though there are not wanting different species of pulse, rye, barley, cotton, tobacco, hemp, flax, and sugarcane. As almost every inch of the land around the village was under cultivation, there was no “common mark” or waste connected with it. Nor were waste lands needed for pasturage, as there was not a single flock of sheep in the village; and the cows and bullocks, of which there was a large number, grazed on the verdant spots on the roadside, on the sloping sides of tanks with high embankments, on the green balks separating one field from another, on the grass-covered areas of mango topes and tamarind groves, and on those patches of untilled land situated near pools of water which ever and anon relieve the eye amid the infinite expanse of never-ending paddy.

CHAPTER IV.

DESCRIBES A RURAL SCENE, AND USHERS OUR HERO INTO
THE WORLD.

Young elms, with early force, in copses bow,
Fit for the figure of the crooked plough :
Of eight feet long, a fastened beam prepare—
On either side the head, produce an ear ;
And sink a socket for the shining share.

Georgics.

It was midday. The cruel sun, like a huge furnace, was sending forth hot flames all around. There was hardly any breeze, the broad leaves of the tall palmyra hung quite motionless ; the cows were resting in the shade of trees, and were chewing the cud ; and the birds were enjoying their mid-day siesta. At such a time, when all Nature seemed to be in a state of collapse, a solitary husbandman was seen ploughing a field on the eastern side of the village.

of Káchanpur. In the previous evening there had been a shower, accompanied with a thunderstorm, and Mánik Sámanta was taking advantage of that circumstance, to prepare the soil for the early crop of *Áus dhún*, so-called from the fact of that sort of paddy ripening in less time than is taken by the *Ámon*, or the winter paddy. As some of our readers may not have seen a Bengal plough, it is as well to describe it here ; and we do not think the object is too low to be described, especially when we remember that it exercised in antiquity the genius of two such poets as Hesiod and Virgil. The Calcutta cockney, who glories in the Mahratta Ditch, despises the scenery of the country, and plumes himself upon the fact of his having never seen in his life the rice-plant, may well be addressed in the language of the poet of the "Seasons" :—

Nor ye who live
In luxury and ease, in pomp and pride,
Think these last themes unworthy of your ear :
Such themes as these the rural Maro sung
To wide imperial Rome, in the full height
Of elegance and taste, by Greece refined.
In ancient times the sacred plough employed
The kings and awful fathers of mankind.

And some, with whom compared your insect tribes
Are but the beings of a summer's day,
Have held the scale of empire, ruled the storm
Of mighty war; then with victorious hand,
Disdaining little delicacies, seized
The plough, and, greatly independent, scorned
All the vile stores corruption can bestow.

What, then, is a Bengal plough? The Bengal plough is very much the same as the Greek and the Roman one, though it has not the mechanical adjustments of its English namesake. For the ilex oak of the Theban bard, and the elm of the Mantuan, the Bengali husbandman substitutes the *bábul*, or rather *bábla*, as the Vardhamána peasant calls it—the *Acacia Arabica* of botanists. The wooden coulter is shod with iron, which serves the purpose of the “shining share.” The plough-tail, which is inclined to the plough-share at an acute angle, is furnished with a short handle, by means of which the peasant guides the share and presses it into the earth. At the meeting-point of the share and tail is a hole, through which passes a beam, to the end of which is attached the yoke. When the machine is set a-going, it is kept tight

by ropes attaching the yoke to the plough-tail. With such a plough Mánik is tilling the ground. But he is not making much head. Look at him. Floods of perspiration are pouring in copious streams down his swarthy cheeks as he holds the plough by both his hands and scolds the bullocks at the top of his voice. The bullocks do not apparently like the idea of working. Every now and then they stand stock-still. Mánik catches the tails of the oxen, twists them with all his might, and abuses the poor animals as if they were pickpockets. “You sálá” (wife’s brother), “why don’t you move? Don’t you see it is getting late? Do you want a bamboozing on your forehead, you brother-in-law of a brute?” Seeing that threats prove unavailing, he has recourse to flattery, and addresses the team thus—“Get on, my treasure, my father, my child; get on a little further, and the whole will be over.” But in vain. The jaded, thirsty, hungry brutes, who had been tugging at the plough since early dawn, refuse to stir. Not far from this scene of alternate scolding and coaxing were observed two men under the shade of an

asvatha tree situated near a pool of water. One of them was lying down on the grass, and the other, who seemed to be the older of the two, had his hookah in his hand.

Let no one grudge the Bengal ráiyat his hookah. It is his only solace amid his dreary toil. The English peasant has his beer and his spirits to refresh and cheer him up, but the Bengal husbandman drinks neither. Should the Legislature be so inconsiderate as to tax tobacco, the poor peasant will be deprived of half his pleasures, and life to him will be an insupportable burden. No ráiyat in Bengal ever goes to his field without the hookah in his hand and a quantity of tobacco wrapped up in a fold of his *dhoti*; and as lucifer matches are unknown to him, he keeps fire in a rope of straw made for the purpose. We may remark, for the benefit of the foreign reader, that the Bengal ráiyat never chews tobacco: he invariably smokes it. He either raises the refreshing leaf in his own field, or buys it in a dry state in the village shop. He cuts each leaf into small pieces, pours into the mass a quantity of treacle and a little water, kneads it as the baker

kneads his dough, and thus reduces it to a pulpy substance. It is then fit to be smoked. The machinery he uses for smoking is altogether of a primitive character. A hollow tube is inserted into a cocoa-nut shell through the opening at the top; a small hole is bored between the two eyes of the shell: the shell is more than half filled with water; a small earthen bowl called *kalki*, filled with the prepared tobacco and fire, is put on the top of the hollow tube; to the hole between the eyes of the cocoa-nut is applied the mouth, which thus draws in the smoke through the tube, making that gurgling noise of the water inside the shell—*blroor, blroor, blroor*—which to the overworked ráiyat is more refreshing than the music of the *tánpurá* or the *viná*. The whole smoking apparatus, which may last for years, need not cost more than a penny; and to a peasant who smokes hard half a farthing's worth of tobacco is sufficient for twenty-four hours. And what infinite comfort and solace does this simple and inexpensive instrument afford to the husbandman! It dries up the sweat of his brow, pours vigour into his muscles, takes away from him all sense of languor, restores

lustre to his sunken eyes, recruits his fading energies, and alleviates the pains of his toilsome life. "What a glorious creature," said the Homer of English novelists, "was he who first discovered the use of tobacco! The industrious retires from business; the voluptuous from pleasure; the lover from a cruel mistress; the husband from a cursed wife; and I from all the world to my pipe." Let Government impose any tax it likes—income tax, license tax, succession tax, salt tax, feast tax, or fast tax, but let it have a care that it does not tax that precious weed, which is the Bengal ráiyat's balm of Gilead—his only solace amid the privations of his wretched life.

But to return: when the older of the two men, sitting and smoking under the tree, saw in what a plight Mánik and his bullocks were, he bawled out, "Ho, Mánik! you had better loosen the oxen, they are tired; and you yourself come and rest here." The moment the bullocks were loosened from the plough, they rushed towards the pool, and putting their fore feet into the water, took a long draught. Mánik himself, with the plough on his shoulders

came to the tree, and began smoking with his companions. The eldest of the party said to the other two, "Brothers, let us all bathe and get ready for *bhát* (boiled rice), as Málati must soon be here." Mánik replied, "Very well, Gayárám," addressing the youngest of the three, "you had better rub your body with oil." Gayárám replied, "Let brother Badan begin."

I need scarcely tell the reader that these three persons were brothers. The eldest, Badan, who was about thirty years old, was the head of the family. Mánik, the second brother, was about twenty-five years of age, and the third, Gayárám, about twenty. Gayárám had charge of the cows which were grazing, and the two elder brothers had come to work with the plough. They had no other clothing than a simple *dhuti*, about four yards long and a yard broad, wrapped round their waists, and descending a little below the knees. The rest of the body was quite bare; they had nothing on their heads, and as for shoes, they had never used any since the day of their birth. The poet Hesiod advises the Boeotian peasant to sow naked, to plough naked,

and to reap naked, but this exhortation of the Theban bard hardly applies to the Bengal ráiyat, as he is always in a state of semi-nudity. Each of the three brothers, however, had a spare piece of cloth called *gámchhá*, or bathing towel, about three cubits long and a cubit and a half broad. The *gámchhá* is indispensable to every Hindu peasant of Bengal, as he bathes every day in the year. But besides its use in bathing, it serves a variety of purposes. It acts as a wrapper for the head, to protect it from the sun; sometimes it serves the purpose of a *chádúr*, or sheet, when it is placed on the shoulder; sometimes it does duty for a belt round the waist, and it is always handy for tying up anything in it, as the Bengal peasant has no pockets.

Badan was of the average height of a Bengali, strong-built, had a rather high forehead, and large, bright eyes, and his body, especially his chest, was thickly covered with hair. Gayárám resembled Badan in features, though they had not become so hard through toil.

Mánik was quite different from the other two;

and no one that did not know him could ever suppose from his look that he was the brother of Badan and Gayárám. His complexion was much darker than that of the other two, it was deep ebony, or rather, glossy Day and Martin; indeed, he had the darkest complexion of anyone in the village, and it was in consequence of this circumstance, that, although his name was Mánik, or the jewel, he was universally called Kálamánik, or the Black Jewel. He was taller than the average run of his countrymen, being upwards of six feet high; he had a large head of hair which was not parted, which never had come in contact with a comb, and which stood erect like the bristles of a porcupine; his mouth was wider than that of most men, and, when open, discovered two rows of ivory-white teeth, so big in size that his friends compared them to the hoe with which he was so familiar as an implement of husbandry. His arms were of such length that when he stood bolt upright the tips of his fingers reached his knee-joints. On each shoulder there was a hump, not unlike that of a Bráhmīni bull, an aggregation of flesh generally owned by *Pálki* bearers and other persons accustomed to carry heavy

loads on their shoulders. His feet were not straight, but took the shape of an arc of a circle. The toes, which closely stuck to one another, were all bent towards the big toe; and he could never move two paces, but some of his toes cracked and gave out a peculiar kind of music. It may be easily conceived that a gigantic figure, upwards of six feet in height, of ebony complexion, wide-mouthed, hoe-toothed, high-shouldered, long-armed, and splay-footed, was not “a thing of beauty,” and therefore not “a joy for ever.” He was an object of terror to all the children of the village, who, when fractious, used invariably to be quiet when they were told that Kālamānik was coming. Nor had the maidens of the village better regard for him. Badan was anxious that Kālamānik should enjoy connubial felicity: but though he easily succeeded in getting a wife for his youngest brother Gayārām, no parents in wide Kānchanpur, or in any village twenty miles around, could be persuaded to bestow the hand of their daughter on the Black Jewel. Kālamānik was more simple than most of his class—indeed, it was generally asserted that he was somewhat silly; but this mental

defect was amply compensated by his great physical strength and courage. He was the swiftest runner, the fastest swimmer, and the best wrestler in the village; he could stop a huge Brahmini bull, when running in fury, by catching hold of its horns; he could carry on his head a whole stack of paddy sheaves; and in every village fray he always stood in the fore-front, and manipulated his club with the strength of Hercules and the unerring precision of Yama himself. Such was the Black Jewel of the Golden City, the uncle of our hero.

After the short conversation given above, Badan took hold of a bamboo phial which was lying on the ground, poured from it on the palm of his hand a quantity of mustard oil, and besmeared with it every part of his body, the hair not excepted, not forgetting at the same time to push a little of the oil into the nostrils and the ears. Kálamánik and Gayárám followed suit. They then bathed in the adjoining pool. Kálamánik enjoyed a swim. He plunged headlong into the water:—

His ebon tresses and his *swarthy* cheek
Instant emerge; and though the obedient wave,

At each short breathing by his lip repelled,
With arms and legs according well, he makes,
As humour leads, an easy-winding path.

Having well wrung the water from the *gúmchhú*, they wrapped it round their loins, and washing their *dhutis* in the pool, spread them on the grass for sunning. They then sat down under the tree and began chewing a small quantity of rice which, tied in an extra *gúmchhú*, had been soaked in water. The chewing over, they went to the pool for a drink, and as they had no vessel with them, they extemporised one by joining together the palms of both hands in the shape of a cup—a primitive and inexpensive mode of drinking universally resorted to by the Bengal peasantry when no vessel is at hand.

Thus refreshed, Badan and Kálamánik went to their plough, while Gayárám sat watching the cows. After the lapse of an hour or two, a little girl was seen approaching the tree under which Gayárám was sitting, with a small bundle in her hand. On seeing her, Badan and Kálamánik loosened the bullocks, and joined the party under the tree.

Badan said, "Well, Málati, so you have brought *bhút*. All right at home?"

The little girl replied, "Yes, *Bábá* (Papa); a *khokú* (male child) has come into the house."

The three simultaneously exclaimed,

"A *khokú*! good! when was it born?"

"At noon," was the reply.

After replying to a few more enquiries, Málati opened her bundle and brought out the dinner, which consisted of a large quantity of boiled rice, and some vegetables cooked with fish. The dinner service consisted of three pieces of plantain-leaf and a brass *ghati* (a small drinking vessel). The little girl dealt out the dinner, and her father (for she was Badan's daughter) and uncles did full justice to it. It is superfluous to say that they ate with their fingers; they drank from the same *ghati*, which was replenished every now and then from the pool, though in the act of drinking their lips did not touch the vessel. After they had gargled their mouths and washed their hands, they again began to smoke. They then resolved, on account of the joyful news they had heard, to discontinue the

labours of the day, and go home; Gayarám, however, stayed behind, as the cows could not well be brought home before sunset.

CHAPTER V.

PHOTOGRAPHS A RÁIYAT'S COTTAGE, AND THOSE WHO LIVE IN IT.

Behold the cot! where thrives th' industrious swain,
Source of his pride, his pleasure, and his gain.

The Parish Register.

WHEN Kálamánik with the plough on his shoulders, and Badan in charge of the yoke of oxen, reached home, they found the yard of their house crowded with a number of women, who had come to congratulate the family on the birth of the new-born babe. One old Bráhmāni (a Bráhman woman), said to the happy father—"Well, Badan, the gods have given you a male child; may he live for ever." Another old woman said—"It is a fine child; the gods give him long life; may he always find plenty to eat and to put on; may his granary be

ever full.” Badan’s mother could hardly speak to him, for her heart was overflowing with joy. Rupá’s mother—for she was the village midwife—was in all her glory. From the door of the lying-in room, into which no one, not even the father of the newly-born child, might enter—for it is regarded as ceremonially unclean—she was every now and then showing the baby with evident pride and satisfaction, as if the new comer were her own son or grandson. While the young husseys and the old gossips are pouring forth congratulations, let us, my gentle reader, take a look at Badan’s cottage.

You enter Badan’s house with your face to the east, through a small door of mango wood on the street, and you go at once to the *uthán*, or open yard, which is indispensable to the house of every peasant in the country. On the west side of the yard, on the same line with the gate of which I have spoken, stands the *bara ghar*, or the big hut. This is the biggest, the neatest, and the most elaborately finished of all Badan’s huts. Its walls, which are of mud, are of great thickness; the thatch, which is of the straw of paddy, is more than a cubit

deep; the bamboo frame-work, on which the thatch is laid, is well compacted together—every interstice being filled with the long and slender reed called *śarú* (*Saccharum sara*) alternating with another reed of red colour; the middle beam, which supports the thatch, though it is neither of the costly teak or *súl*, is made of the pith of the palmyra; and the floor is raised at least five feet from the ground. The hut is about sixteen cubits long and twelve cubits broad, including the verandah, which faces the yard, and which is supported by props of palmyra. It is divided into two compartments of unequal size, the bigger one being Badan's sleeping room, and the smaller one being the store-room of the family, containing a number of *húnḍis*, or earthen vessels, filled with provisions. The verandah is the parlour or the drawing-room of the family. There friends and acquaintances sit on mats. In Badan's sleeping-room are kept the brass vessels of the house and other valuables. There is no *khút* or bedstead in it, for Badan sleeps on the mud floor, a mat and a quilt stuffed with cotton interposing between his body and mother earth. There is not much light in the room, for the

thatch of the verandah prevents its admission, while there is but one small window high up on the wall towards the street. I need scarcely add that there is no furniture in the room—no table, no chairs, no stools, no almirah, no wardrobe, no benches; there is only in one corner a solitary wooden box. In one side of the room two whole bamboos are stuck into the walls on which clothes are hung, and on which the bedding is put up in the day. Such is the *bara ghar*, or the big hut.

On the south side of the yard, and at right angles to the big hut, is a smaller hut of far inferior construction, which serves a variety of purposes, and which is used by the women of the family when in an interesting condition. When not required for that purpose it is used as a lumber-room, or rather as a tool-room, for keeping the implements of husbandry. On the present occasion by Badan's wife and Rupá's mother. In the verandah of this little hut is placed the *dhenki*, or the rice-husking pedal. From this circumstance the little hut is called *dhenkiśúlú* (pedal-house), or more familiarly *dhenśkúl*.

In the south-east corner of the yard, and at right

angles to the *dhenkisálá*, is another hut of somewhat better construction, inside which Gayarám sleeps, and the verandah of which serves the purpose of a kitchen. From this latter circumstance it is called *páksálá* (cooking-house), but Badan and his family always called it by the more familiar name of *rínnághar*. The only other hut on the premises is the cow-house, called *gosálá*, or more familiarly *goál*. It is situated to the north of the yard, nearly parallel to the big hut, only the cow-house is much longer than all the other huts. Several large earthen tubs, called *nánds*, which serve the purposes of troughs, are put on the floor, half buried in small mounds of earth, near which are stuck in the ground tether-posts of bamboo. In one corner is a sort of fire-place, where every night a fire, or rather smoke, of cow-dung cakes is made, chiefly for the purpose of saving the bovine inmates from the bite of mosquitoes and fleas.

The eastern side of the premises opens on a tank which supplies the family of Badan, as it does other families in the neighbourhood, with water, not, indeed, for drinking, but for every other pur-

pose; the drinking water being obtained from one of those big tanks of which I have spoken in the preceding chapter, and which are situated on the outskirts of the village. On the edge of this tank are a few trees belonging to Badan. There is a tall palmyra tree near the *ghát*, or landing-place, surrounded by a bush, which prevents the women, when they go to the water's edge, from being seen. There is a *jam* tree (*Eugenia jambolana*) not far from it, and at no great distance is a date tree, which is so situated that its fruit, when it drops, falls into the water.

About the middle of the *uthán*, or yard, and near the cow-house, is the granary of paddy, called *golí* in other parts of the country, but in the Vardhamána district invariably called *marúi*. It is cylindrical in shape, made entirely of ropes of twisted straw, with a circular thatch on the top. It contains a quantity of paddy sufficient for the consumption of the family from one harvest to another. Not far from the granary is the *páluí*, or straw stack, which is an immense pile of paddy-straw kept in the open air, to serve as fodder for cows and oxen

for a whole year. Behind the kitchen, and near the tank, is the *sárkuḍa*, or the dust-heap of the family, which is a large hole, not very deep, into which the sweepings of the yard, the ashes of the kitchen, the refuse of the cow-house, and all sorts of vegetable matter, are thrown. This dust-heap, though somewhat hurtful in a sanitary point of view, is essentially necessary to our ráiyat, as it supplies him with manure for his fields.

In other respects, our Mofussil villages' are better supplied in regard to sanitary arrangements than Europeans might suspect. Their great sanitary officers are the wild village pigs, who easily, instantaneously, and inexpensively remove all obnoxious matter from the neighbourhood.

We may remark that the huts which we have described were originally built by one of Badan's ancestors; that the thatching was slightly repaired every year, and replaced every five or six years; that Badan paid nothing for their use, as they were his own property; and that the only sum he paid to the zamindár for his homestead was one rupée, or two shillings, a year as ground-rent.

As we have said so much of the dwelling-place of our peasant family, we must say something here of its inmates. With Badan, Kálamánik, and Gayárám, our readers have already formed acquaintance. It is necessary, however, to give the full names of the three brothers. They were as follows: Badan Chandra Sámanta, Mánik Chandra Sámanta, and Gayárám Sámanta. They were not of the *sadyopa* caste, as most of the peasants of Kánchanpur were, but of the *ugra-kshatriya* or *águri* caste—a class of men abounding chiefly in the Vardhamána district, and noted for their courage, personal strength, and independence. The other members of the family were Badan's mother, Alanga; his wife, Sundari; his daughter, Málati; and Gayárám's wife, Áduri. Alanga, forty-six years old, was the *grihini* or mistress of the household. Her son Badan paid her boundless respect, and always agreed to every domestic arrangement she made. Nor were her other sons and her daughters-in-law less obedient to her. Badan's wife, Sundari, might be expected, according to English notions, as the wife of the head of the family, to feel aggrieved at her being

deprived of her rightful authority as the mistress of the house. But such a notion is never entertained by a Bengali wife while her mother-in-law is living. And the idea never occurred to Sundari. She deemed it her duty, and esteemed it a privilege, to be under the guardianship of her husband's mother. She was thankful that all domestic affairs were under the management of one so much older, wiser, and more experienced than she. As the eldest daughter-in-law in the house, Sundari was the cook of the family, in which work she was assisted by Gayáram's wife, Áduri. Now that Sundari was confined, the work of the kitchen devolved chiefly on Badan's mother, Alanga, as Áduri was too young to be wholly trusted with that important department.

Unlike Sundari, Áduri was somewhat peevish and often showed temper, especially when, as on the present occasion, she had a great deal to do. She was naturally of an imperious disposition, and therefore hated the idea of playing second—or rather third—fiddle in the family. Amidst the general harmony which prevailed in Badan's house, she

was the only cause of discord. With Badan and Kálamánik she, of course, never exchanged a single word in her life; for it is reckoned a piece of the greatest indecency on the part of a woman even to look at the face of her husband's elder brothers, though with his younger brothers she is permitted to be quite familiar. Áduri had therefore not only not spoken to Badan and Kálamánik, but they had never seen her face, she being always completely veiled when going about in the house in their presence. She often gave cross answers to her mother-in-law, for which she got curtain-lectures from her husband at night—indeed, now and then something more substantial than lectures, namely, a slap or a cuff, in consequence of which the whole of the following day she gave sullen looks and pcevish answers.

Málati, Badan's daughter, was a girl of about seven years of age. Though her complexion was by no means fair, her features were far from disagreeable. She had the gentleness of her mother's disposition, and though as the first, and for a long time the only child in the house, she was made too much of, her head never got turned. She never did

a rude thing, nor uttered a cross word. She was the joy of Badan's life. After the fatiguing labours of the day in the field, he would of an evening sit cross-legged on the open yard of the house, and, with hookah in hand, would listen to her sweet prattle, reciting the incidents of the day in the little family. Nor was she less useful than agreeable. She assisted her mother and grandmother in fifty little things in the house; and also in going on errands, bringing from the village shop mustard oil, salt, and other little articles for daily consumption; and taking to the fields the dinner of her father and her uncles.

The description of a farmer's household would be imperfect if, besides treating of the *homines*, it did not also include what the Romans, who paid so great attention to agriculture, called the *adminicula hominum*, those domestic cattle without whose assiduous and disinterested co-operation the husbandman could not reap the fruits of his industry. As Badan had about thirty-six *bighás*, or nearly twelve acres, of land, he had only one plough, and therefore two bullocks. One of these bullocks was of black complexion, and therefore called Kele, and the other

being brownish was called Sāmlā. They were between seven and eight years of age; had seen good service, and as they were far from infirm, many years of useful industry lay before them. As they were, in a manner, the support of the family, particular care was bestowed on them. Gáyārām, every morning and evening, filled their tubs with chopped straw, well soaked in a solution of water and oil-cake. But Kele and Sāmlā were not the only inmates of the cow-house. There were three milch-cows with their calves, two young steers in the process of training for the plough, and a heifer. The oldest cow, named Bhágavati, gave only three quarters of a *seer* of milk in the morning, and half a *seer* in the evening; the next in age, called Jhumri, gave a *seer* and a half in the morning, and one *seer* in the evening; and the last, though not the least in value, called Kāmadhenu (the cow of desire) gave every morning three *seers* of milk, as thick as the juice of the fruit of the *Ficus Indica*, and two *seers* in the evening. The two young steers were called by no particular names; but the heifer, the favourite of Málati, about two years old, was called Lakshmi. These cows were

all attended to by Gayáram, who was the neat-herd of the family. Besides grazing on the fields nearly the whole day, they had their *nánds*, or tubs, filled every evening with chopped straw and mustard oil-cakes, and they chewed dry straw in the morning; while Kámadhenu, the best cow in the house, in addition to ordinary fodder, had every now and then *blusi* (husk of pulse), and occasionally a gourd boiled together with *khud*, the refuse of rice. Every morning after the cow-house had been cleansed, Málati used to visit Lakshmi while she was in the act of chewing her dry straw, stroked her body, caught hold of her little horns, and played with her; and the gentle creature seemed really to have affection for Málati. The reader may ask what Badan did with so much milk. I answer that all the three cows did not give milk at the same time; that some was drunk by the women, especially by Málati: that some quantity was sold every day to a Bráhmaṇ family in the neighbourhood; that some was made into cream and then into *ghi*, or clarified butter; and some into curds for home consumption. It was a happy day when the cream was churned, and *ghi* made by old

Alanga, as it gave the family the benefit of a large quantity of sour milk, of which they were all fond.

Besides the bullocks and the cows, Badan had no other domestic animals. He had no poultry, for fowls, ducks, and geese are abomination to the majority of Hindus, and to that particular caste to which Badan belonged. He had one more animal besides those we have mentioned, and that was a dog. But dogs are not cared for in Bengal; they are not even touched by their masters, being reckoned unclean. Bághá, or Tiger—so the dog was called, either on account of his ferocious disposition or on account of some fancied resemblance to a tiger—used always to lie about the door and in the open yard, and had for his meals a handful of boiled rice from each male inmate of the house, who, after finishing breakfast or dinner, carried it to him on his way to the tank to wash his mouth and hands. Besides this stated provision, Bághá procured whatever he could from the houses in the neighbourhood and from the streets.

CHAPTER VI.

FIXES THE FATE AND NAME OF OUR HERO.

The destyné, mynistre general,
That excecuteh in the world over-al
The purveiauns, that God hath seyn byforn ;
So strong it is, that though the world hadde sworn
The contrarye of a thing by ye or nay,
Yet somtyn it schald falle upon a day
That falleth nought eft in a thousand yeere.

The Knighte's Tale.

IN the *sútikágríha*, or lying-in-room, the sixth day after the birth of a child is an important day. Besides the worship of the goddess Shashṭhi, the protectress of children, which takes place in the day, the destiny of the child is fixed on that night by Vidhátá Purusha, the Creator, and written in indelible characters on its forehead. As Vidhátá is not expected to bring with Him writing materials, an inkstand and a reed pen are put at the door of the

room ; but neither Badan nor his brothers have ever been initiated into the mysteries of reading and writing, and there was neither pen nor ink in the house. Alanga, therefore, who took more interest in the affair than any other member of the family, borrowed writing materials from a neighbour, and put them at the inner threshold of the lying-in-room. There is no fixed time for the appearance of Vidhátá ; he may come at any time in the night ; and as it is important that some one should be awake at the time, the duty of sitting up devolves on the midwife. Rupá's mother did not close her eyes that night. As everyone else in the house was asleep—only old Alanga's sleep was greatly disturbed through excitement—no one knew what happened at night except Rupá's mother, who next morning related the whole story. For the benefit of the reader we here give a translation of her account :—

“After two *praharas* of the night were over,” said Rupá's mother, “I heard the sound of footsteps at the door, especially on that side where the pen and ink were. The same sound of footfall was heard all along the passage from the door to where

the baby was sleeping by the mother. Immediately after I heard a sound similar to that which is made by a man when writing, but I saw no figure. By the light of the fire, however, I saw a smile playing on the lips of the baby. Shortly after I heard the sound of retreating footsteps, and I rushed towards the door and said, ‘*Thákur* (god) ! I hope you have written favourably.’ The god knew me well, as he has often seen me, and told me what he had written on the forehead of the child, but on condition of the strictest secrecy. I dare not disclose it to you, for if I disclose it Vidhátá will be angry with me, and kill me outright by twisting my neck. But, oh ! mother Alanga, rejoice, for your grandchild’s *kapála* (forehead) is good.” I cannot take upon me to assert that Badan and his brothers credited the story, but I am certain that all the women of the house believed that Vidhátá Purusha had revealed to Rupá’s mother what he had written on the child’s forehead.

Two days after—that is, when the infant was eight days old—a ceremony called the *Átkouḍiyá* (eight cowries) was performed. Alanga and Áduri were very busy all that day. They fried paddy,

and made it into *lhadi*, and eight sorts of pulse. Badan also brought from the village money-changer a large quantity of shells called *kadi* or cowries. About sunset a number of boys of the village, chiefly of the peasant class, came to Badan's house, and, standing in the yard, made a great noise with winnowing fans which they carried in their hands, and, approaching the door of the lying-in room, bawled out: "*Atkoude ! bátkoude !* is the baby well?" The little urchins perpetrated many jokes at the expense of Alanga and the midwife—they laughed, they danced, they made noises with the winnowing-fans. Alanga, in the meantime, came to the yard with a basket in her hand, and scattered over the heads of the boys the shells and the fried paddy and pulse. The boys scrambled for these treasures, trod upon one another's heels, threw down one another, and made infinite fun. Thus merrily went off the *Átkou-diya* of Badan's child; and Alanga's joy knew no bounds.

On the twenty-first day of her confinement, Sundari was bathed for the first time, came out of the *sutikágriha*, and joined the family after the

worship of the goddess Shashthi. She did not, however, at once after her purification, commence to discharge the duties to which she had been accustomed, as a good deal of her time was taken up with the baby. But the baby was no great burden to her; it was constantly attended to by its grandmother and aunt, while Málati always sat by it and watched the movements of its little hands and fingers with the liveliest interest. Baby had no clothing of any sort. In Bengal, unlike England, there is no fear of babies catching cold; all babies are therefore allowed to revel in unfettered nakedness. Besmeared with mustard oil—a large quantity being especially put in the hollow of the chest—Sundari's baby used every day to be laid on a piece of plank, called *pindá*, and exposed to the sun for some hours. European doctors will perhaps hold up their hands in astonishment, and declare that such exposure is calculated to result in infanticide. But Bengali peasant women know better. They consider that a good sunning of this sort is an admirable preparation for the child's duties in after life. Thanks to this grilling during infancy,

there are scarcely any cases of *coup de soleil* amongst Bengal peasants, though they live in one of the hottest countries in the world, and are incessantly exposed, bare-headed, to the scorching rays of a fierce sun. The head gets sun-hardened, and defies the fiery god of day to do his worst.

When the child was seven months old, and after the *áus* crop had been gathered in, came the ceremony of *Annaprásana*, or the Feast of Rice, generally called by women *blujno* (that is, *bhojana*), or the feast when rice is for the first time put into the mouth of the infant. The feast of a child's first rice is celebrated by wealthy Hindus with great pomp. Badan, being a poor man, could not afford to spend much; still, being an orthodox Hindu, and diligently observant of the customs of his forefathers, he thought it his duty to spend something. The goddess Shashthi was first worshipped; this ceremony was followed by a feast to a select party of Badan's kinsmen. A Bengal Hindu peasant's feast is by no means an expensive affair. The bill of fare consisted of the following dishes:—*bhút*, or boiled rice; *dál*, of the

pulse called *kalúí*; *chhenchki*, usually called *tarkúri* in the Vardhamána district, a sort of hodge-podge, consisting of potatoes, brinjal, and tender stalks of the creeper *pani*; fish fried in mustard oil, fish cooked with tamarind; and, last of all, curds. The small party, consisting only of males—for the women eat separately—sat in two rows on the floor of the verandah of the big room; a piece of plantain leaf was placed before each on the ground; a brass *ghati* filled with water was put on the left-hand side of each guest, and a small quantity of salt on the right-hand side. Alanga, who alone attended on the guests, appeared on the scene with a large dish of boiled rice, and put a quantity on each of the plantain-leaves. She appeared again with a large *hánḍi* of *dál*, and put a quantity upon the rice on each of the plantain-leaves. She next came with *tarkúri*, and dealt out a little to each. Then commenced the business of eating, during the progress of which, the fish cooked in tamarind, the most prized of all the dishes, was distributed. As two large *rohita* fishes, each weighing ten or twelve seers—that is twenty or twenty-four pounds—caught in Badan's

own tank, had been cooked, there was a superfluity of that delicacy. Badan, happy in celebrating the *annaprāsana* of his son and heir, pressed his guests to eat heartily; and Alanga, in the overflow of her joy, put on every plantain-leaf heaps of the cooked fish, though the guests shouted out at the top of their voices, "Give no more; give no more; we shan't be able to eat half of what is on the leaf." In the end, however, not a particle of the fish remained on any of the plantain-leaves. Last of all, Alanga brought out a large *hūṇḍi* of *dudhi*, or curds. As the curds were not very thick, one would have thought it impossible to eat, or rather drink them off a plantain-leaf, on which the liquid could hardly find a *locus standi*. The ingenious guests, however, had cleared off in the middle of the leaf a circular space, encompassed by a wall of rice, which prevented the curds from flowing out on the floor. The eating over, each one took hold of the brass *ghati* with the left hand—the right hand having become dirty with eating—and poured its contents down the throat, in such a manner, however, that the vessel did not touch their lips. The guests then hastened to the

tank to wash their hands and mouths; after which, they chewed *pán* leaves, together with a mixture of quick-lime, betel-nut, coriander-seed, catechu, cloves, cinnamon, and cardamums. They then sat on a mat in the yard, and smoked to their hearts' content. On departing, the guests pronounced a thousand blessings on the head of the child, who had that day been named Govinda Chandra Sámanta.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PROTECTRESS OF CHILDREN.

And are there then celestial habitants
Whom a kind Father's care around us plants,
Sent to walk with us in our earthly trance ?

Keble.

THE reader will have noticed that in the last chapter allusion was more than once made to the worship of Shashṭhi, the beneficent goddess whose happy vocation it is to take care of children, and protect them from danger and trouble, to which they are so constantly exposed on account of their helplessness ; and since we regard this divinity as one of the most amiable creations of Hindu mythology, we trust we shall be excused for dwelling a little on the adoration of the Protectress of Children.

The goddess is called Shashṭhi, or the sixth,

because she is believed to be the sixth part of the divine essence of *Pradhána-Prakriti*, the male and female creative principles, by whose influence this universe has been generated. The following legend is related in connection with her worship:—"Priyavrata, the son of Svayambhu-Manu, who had spent many years in enthusiastic and solitary devotion, was at last persuaded by Brahmá to contract the bonds of matrimony. But as his wife did not for a long time present him with offspring, he desired the divine sage Káśyapa to celebrate the *putreshti-yága*, on the completion of which the sage gave her to eat the sacrificial *charu* (rice cooked in clarified butter), on swallowing which she became *enceinte*. In due time she brought into the world a son 'as bright as gold,' but, unfortunately, still-born. The king (Priyavrata) with a sad heart, took the dead child and laid it on the funeral pile with a view to cremation. On a sudden, however, there appeared overhead in the sky, a goddess of surpassing beauty, radiant as the summer sun. The king, entranced with her heavenly grace, asked her who she was. The goddess said, 'I am the wife of Kártikeya; the Chief of Mothers; and

as I am the sixth part of *Prakṛiti*, men call me 'Shashṭhi.' So saying, the bright goddess took hold of the child, gave it breath and life, and made a gesture, as if she was going to take it away with her to the realms of glory. The king, petrified with fear, addressed many a fervent prayer, beseeching her to restore the infant to him. The goddess, pleased with the incense of praise, said, 'O thou son of Svayambhu-Mánu, thou art the lord of the three worlds! If thou promise to celebrate my praise as long as thou livest, I will give the child to thee.' The king readily agreed to the condition, embraced the child, and returned home with a joyful heart." As a grateful return for her favour he celebrated the worship of Shashṭhi with the utmost pomp. From that time the worship of Shashṭhi became one of the most popular institutions in the land of *Bhárata*. She is worshipped every month, on the sixth day of the waxing moon, by every Hindu wife who has not been blessed with offspring, on the sixth and the twenty-first day after the birth of a child, and at *Annaprāsana*, or the Feast of the First Rice.

The proper image of Shashthi is a woman of matronly appearance, painted yellow, riding on a cat, and nursing a child; but usually she is represented by a rude stone, not bigger than a man's head, painted with red-lead, and placed under a *vata* tree (*Ficus Indica*) in the outskirts of the village; while not unfrequently she is worshipped in the form of a branch of the *vata* tree stuck in the yard of a house.

One of the pleasantest sights ever witnessed in a Hindu village in Bengal is the spectacle presented some day in the month of Jaishtha, under a large banyan tree just outside the hamlet. There the womanhood of the village—matrons, mothers, wives, spinsters—are assembled, dressed in their *pújâ's* best, their bodies loaded with ornaments, their faces shining with oil, their veils gracefully hanging over their heads, with offerings in their hands. The priest recites the holy texts, and blesses every woman present; the offerings go, of course, to him; but some of them are given away to those unfortunate women—they are regarded such by Hindus—who have not borne the fruit of marriage. These women

receive the gifts eagerly in the skirts of *sāḍis* (women's clothes), while the proud mothers say to them, "The blessing of Mother Shashṭhi be upon you! May you next year come to this spot, not only with offerings, but also with a child in your arms." The ceremony is then concluded, and the women return to their homes.

On the sixth day after the birth of our hero Govinda, the worship of Shashṭhi was, as we have already said, performed. It took place in the open yard, where the branch of a *vaṭa* tree was stuck in the ground. The father of the child presented offerings, and prayers were offered to the effect that, if the beneficent goddess would be pleased to spare the life of the child, more gifts would be offered on the twenty-first day. At the door of the house was placed the skull of a cow, its forehead painted with red-lead, and three *kaḍis* were stuck on three lumps of cow-dung; over the whole, a yellow cloth—the symbol of Shashṭhi—was spread. This was allowed to remain at the door for a whole month, and was regarded as a security of the infant's preservation and welfare.

On the twenty-first day after the birth of Govinda was performed the ceremony of *ekusiyá*, or the Twenty-first. Sundari, coming out of the *sutiká-griha*, bathed and dressed in clean clothes, repaired to the stone under the *vata* tree, adorned it with a garland of flowers, presented offerings to it, and, with the assistance of the priest, went through some religious ceremonies. She made many a vow, and besought Mother Shashthi to protect her child. A few sweetmeats which had been offered to the goddess were then distributed to bystanders, and the *pújá* was concluded.

Of the Hindu Lares and Penates, Shashthi is by no means an unimportant personage. As the imparters of fecundity to women, as the protectress of children, and the patroness of domestic happiness, Mother Shashthi, as she is generally called, is universally regarded, especially by women, with feelings not only of the deepest reverence, but of the warmest affection. Sundari through her whole life manifested the greatest delight in the worship of that divine mother to whose kindness she equally attributed the preservation of her own life during

the recent trials, and the safety of her child. May we not regard this amiable fiction of Shashṭhi as an adumbration of the teaching of Scripture, that children are the especial objects of the ministrations of celestial spirits?

CHAPTER VIII.

THE VILLAGE ASTROLOGER.

—Not far from hence doth dwell
A cunning man, hight Sidrophel,
That deals in destiny's dark counsels,
And sage opinions of the moon sells ;
To whom all people far and near,
On deep importances repair :
When brass and pewter hap to stray,
And linen slinks out of the way ;
When geese and pullen are seduced,
And sows of sucking pigs are chows'd ;
When cattle feel indisposition,
And need the opinion of physician ;
When murrain reigns in hog or sheep,
And chickens languish of the pip ;
To him with questions, and with urine,
They for discovery flock, or curing.

Hudibras.

“Ho, BADAN ! are you at home ? ” said a husky voice
at the door of Badan's house one evening, a few
days after the celebration of the Feast of First Rice.

“Who are you?” shouted Badan from the verandah of the big room, where he was sitting and enjoying a pull or two of the peaceful hookah.

“I am Surya Kánta,” replied the husky voice.

“Come in,” said Badan, and jumped out of the verandah towards the door. “Come in, Áchárya Mahásaya; this is an auspicious day when the door of my house has been blessed with the dust of your honour’s feet. Gayáram, fetch an *ásan* (a small carpet), for the Áchárya Mahásaya to sit on.”

The Áchárya having put off his shoes—I should rather say, slippers, for Bengalis, as a rule, excepting those who imitate English customs, put on only slippers—and taken his seat, said,

“Well, Badan, I hope you are quite well. I was glad to hear that the *annaprásana* of your son went off very well. And why should it not? Your ancestors, though poor, were all good, pious, and God-fearing men, men at whose birth, the sun, moon, the planets, and the zodiacal constellations shed their most benign influences; and, I have no doubt that your son, whom, I understand, you have called Govinda, has been born under similar auspicious

influences. This can be owing only to your piety, and the piety of your son in his former birth. Are you not thinking, Badan, of getting a horoscope made of your son?"

"I should like very much to have Govinda's nativity cast; but you know, Áchárya Mahásaya, I am a poor man. I am in arrears already to the jamidár,* and in debt to the *maháján* (money-lender); and what little was in the house has been just spent on my child's first rice."

"Oh, never mind about payment; I can wait; and you know, you and I are old friends, I will not charge you much."

"What will you take for a good horoscope?"

"If you want to know the proper price of a horoscope, I may tell you that I cast, not long ago, a horoscope of the child of a *Bania*, and I got a gold *mohar* for it (thirty-two shillings)."

"A gold *mohar*! But surely there is a great difference between a *Bania* and a poor ráiyat like

* Hindu Bengalis always call the zamindár, *jamidár*—the Persian *zamin* (land) being naturalized in the Bengali language in the form *jami*.

myself—as great a difference as between a Bráhmaṇ and a *Chandála*. What will you take from me for a horoscope of Govinda?”

“You asked me the proper price of a horoscope, therefore I mentioned one gold *mohar*; but of course I won’t charge you that sum. I don’t wish to make a bargain with you. Let me first cast a horoscope, and you can pay whatever you like.”

“I am a poor man, what can I pay you? I cannot give you a sum of money worthy of your acceptance; but if you make a good horoscope I’ll give you, at the next harvest, two *solis* of *áus* and two *solis* of *áman* paddy.”

“You are becoming very niggardly, Badan; well, besides the four *solis* of paddy you have promised, give me also half a *man* (maund—that is, about eighty pounds avoirdupois) of molasses at the time of cutting sugar-cane, and I’ll cast your child’s horoscope.”

“You, Ácháryas, are very fond of sweet things. Well, I agree. Set about the matter immediately. What time will you take to complete it?”

“Casting a horoscope, Badan, is not an easy affair; it is no child’s play. It requires intricate

calculations regarding the position of the heavenly bodies and their influences. I could not do it in less than a month."

"Very well, bring the horoscope after a month, and I'll give you what I have promised at the harvest and at the time of cutting sugar-cane. But see that you make a horoscope, a favourable one."

"You speak like a woman, Badan. How can I make a horoscope either favourable or unfavourable? Everything depends on the position of the heavenly bodies at the moment of your child's birth. If he has been born under auspicious influences his horoscope will be a favourable one; if otherwise, then unfavourable. I can but interpret the heavens and the gods. But I have no doubt that it will be a favourable one, considering that you are a good man, and have faith in gods and Bráhmans."

This Surya Kánta Áchárya, with whom Badan had the above conversation, was the astrologer of Kánchanpur. By his proper name, however, he was not generally known, the villagers insisting on calling him "Dhumketu," or the "Comet," in consequence of his having predicted, some years since, a terrible

famine and pestilence, from the appearance in the heavens of a “fiery broomstick,” as the people called the comet. It is not every village in Bengal that rejoices in the possession of an astrologer, but Kánchanpur being a large village and inhabited by a considerable number of rich men, it had one. Dhumketu cast the nativities of male children—for girls have no horoscopes properly so called, the dates of their birth and the positions of the heavenly bodies being briefly registered in a small slip of paper—not only of Kánchanpur but of several villages round about. But casting of horoscopes was not his only work. He also pointed out auspicious and inauspicious days by calculating the positions of the heavenly bodies, which trade brought him no little gain, as orthodox Hindus never engage in any important work, like marriage, or even undertaking a journey to a distant place, without first ascertaining from the astrologer the most auspicious day for its performance. He was also, at the beginning of a new year, in the habit of *reading the new almanack*, as it is called, in the house of every respectable orthodox Hindu, which *reading* consisted in a pro-

phetic review, or rather prevision, of the leading astronomical phenomena and astrological events of the coming year, together with the recitation of a few legends connected with the subject; and every person who heard the new almanack read or recited was bound to give some present, however little, to the *Āchārya*.

But Dhumketu not only cast nativities and recited the new almanack; he pursued the profession of a *ganatkāra*, or calculator—that is to say, a diviner. He was so skilful in the manipulation of figures that it might have been said of him—

In Mathematics he was greater
Than Tycho Brahe or Erra Pater;
For he, by geometric scale,
Could take the size of pots and ale;
Resolve by sines and tangents straight,
If bread or butter wanted weight;
And wisely tell what hour o' the day
The clock does strike, by Algebra.

This miraculous knowledge of figures Dhumketu turned to a very profitable account. Whenever the cow of a peasant strayed and could not be found; whenever an ornament of gold or silver—a pair of bangles or earrings, for example—was filched from

its rightful owner; whenever a plate of Monghyr clay-slate, or of brass, was missing; in all such cases Dhumketu was able, by skilfully handling a bit of chalk, and by tracing hieroglyphical characters on the mud floor of his hut, to tell with infallible certainty the present *locus* of the strayed or missing articles. His humble hut was frequented by the rich and the poor of Kánchanpur and the neighbouring villages, who were anxious to know who had stolen their golden ornaments or where their cows had strayed. Though his predictions often turned out false, the people were not shaken in their belief in his supernatural skill, for sometimes his divination proved correct; and such is human credulity, that, in divination, the failures are forgotten, and the successes carefully remembered. There was one notable case of failure which was remembered for a long time, though it did not permanently injure his reputation as a diviner. Two very respectably dressed gentlemen, natives of a village some miles distant from Kánchanpur, once went to the prophet to ask where one of their cows, which had strayed, was. As peasants only come to the prophet on the errand of strayed cows, he was

completely thrown out of his calculations. From the respectable look of the enquirers, Dhumketu never dreamed that they had come to ask about a cow; he shrewdly guessed that they had lost some article of gold, a gold chain, or a diamond ring. Accordingly, as was his custom, after tracing on the floor a world of unintelligible characters, he looked intently at the faces of the two men, and repeated the following words: "You have lost a substance, a substance; of a metallic nature, of a metallic nature; gold, gold, gold; diamond, diamond, diamond; gold and diamond, gold and diamond: yes, it is a gold ring, diamond set. It is wrapped up in a bit of cloth in the eaves of the cottage-thatch of your maid servant." The two men laughed outright in the face of the diviner, and told him that one of their best cows was missing. Nothing abashed, Dhumketu immediately said: "Oh yes, yes, I see that I put a wrong figure there through inadvertence. Of course it is a cow; you will find it in the house of your maid-servant." Such was the village astrologer, who now set about casting the horoscope of our hero.

True to his word, Dhumketu brought Govinda's

horoscope after a month. It was a roll of yellow paper measuring, when opened out, about ten cubits long, bristling in every page with figures and the zodiacal signs, and written in Sanskrit from beginning to end. The fortunes of the native were calculated up to the hundredth year, the character of the events of each year being briefly indicated by one or two short sentences. The following words frequently occurred in this prophetic roll of our hero's life—*dhana dhānya vridhhi*, that is, literally, the *increase of wealth and paddy*. Several *phāṇḍās*, that is, accidents or misfortunes, were mentioned, the most serious of which was predicted to occur about the thirtieth year of our hero's life; the baneful influence of the planet Saturn that year of the native's life would be so great that the astrologer put it down as extremely doubtful whether Govinda would survive the malignant attack. Badan took into his hands the horoscope with the utmost reverence, and locked it up in the wooden box which lay in a corner of the big room, and which was the repository of all valuable documents. The astrologer did not acquaint him with the *phāṇḍās* or misfortunes which were to

befal our hero ; he assured him only in general terms that Govinda's life on the whole was to be a career of continual and ever-increasing prosperity. In due time Dhumketu was rewarded for his pains, agreeably to contract, with four *solis* of paddy and half a *man* of molasses.

CHAPTER IX.

AN IMPORTANT DISCUSSION.

But knowledge to their eyes her ample page,
Rich with the spoils of time, did ne'er unroll;
Chill penury repressed their noble rage,
And froze the genial current of the soul.

Gray.

THERE is nothing worthy of notice during the first five years of the life of Govinda, except that one day, while he was crawling in the yard of the house and was left to himself, the little urchin crawled on to the edge of the tank and fell into it. Fortunately at that time Áduri was at the *ghát* scouring the brass and stone vessels of the family. When she saw the child tumble into the water she gave a loud scream; but as the water in that part of the tank was shallow, she easily took him up, and was glad to find that

he had received no hurt. Thus grew up little Govin, crawling through the length and breadth of the yard, his naked body covered with dust. Málati was often with him, making him stand on his legs, and teaching him to walk to the sound of the doggerel verse :—

Chali, chali, pá, pá,

that is to say, “Walk, walk, step by step.” When the child was five years old, an important conversation was held regarding his future by Badan and Alanga. In order to prepare the reader for understanding the conversation which is given below, it is necessary to remark that in Bengal, in all well-to-do Hindu families, the education of a male child commences in his sixth year, and that the commencement is celebrated by a religious ceremony, in which Sarasvati, the goddess of wisdom, is worshipped and invoked to shed on her young votary her selected influences. This ceremony is called *háte khaḍi*, that is, “putting chalk into the hands of a child,” as the child commences his education by tracing on the floor, with a bit of chalk, the characters of the Bengali alphabet. The question which had been for some

time agitating the mind of Badan was, whether he should give his son, Govinda, the elements of education, that is, instruct him in the three R's—Reading, 'Riting, and 'Rithmetic. He had felt his own sad deficiency in this respect, as he could neither read nor write—indeed, he had never learnt the Bengali alphabet, nor any other alphabet in the world. He thought that if his son were initiated into the mysteries of reading and writing he might be more prosperous in life than himself, and prove a match for the wily *gomaśtá* and the oppressive zamindár. But as he would not undertake a thing of this kind without consulting his mother, whom he highly revered, and for whose practical wisdom he had great respect, he resolved at some convenient opportunity to break his mind to her.

Accordingly, one day, in the afternoon, having little to do in the fields, he came home earlier than usual, leaving Gayarám to look after the cows, and Kálamánik to weed the paddy field. He found his mother sitting on the verandah of the kitchen, and busily engaged in spinning. He washed his hands, feet, and face in the tank, and preparing the hookah

for a smoke, took it in his hand, went to his mother, and sat beside the *charká* or spinning wheel.

Has the English reader seen a Bengali *charká*? It is not unlike the Jersey or the Saxon spinning wheel still used in the country parts of England and Scotland, though somewhat more primitive in its construction, there being no wheel properly so called, but a rude apology for one. Two planks of wood placed parallel to each other are joined together by driving two sticks into them. Between the planks is suspended a solid ball of wood with spokes on it, supported by sticks, and so placed that it is made to whirl round by turning a handle at the end. The spindle is put upon three supports on the other plank, connected with the wheel, or rather with the wooden ball with spokes, by means of a thong. Carded cotton in the shape of fleecy rollers of the length of half a foot is applied to the point of the spindle by the left hand, while the right hand turns the wheel. One turn of the wheel produces a great many revolutions of the spindle, which twists the cotton and lengthens it out in thread or yarn for the weaver. I may here remark that in Bengal,

unlike England, generally old women, and especially widows, spin—the younger women being engaged in more active household duties; so that a Bengali “spinster” is not like her English sister, an unmarried girl, but an old woman. And I cannot but think that the Bengali, in this respect, is wiser than the Englishman; for, sitting down for hours in a bent posture, and drearily turning the spinning wheel, cannot but prove prejudicial to the growth and health of a girl, whereas to an old woman it cannot do much hurt. But however this may be, while Alanga was busily turning the *charká*, Badan sat quietly by her, and began to smoke. Neither of them spoke for some time, enjoying, we presume, the exquisite music which was produced between them. The “*bhroor—bhroor—bhroor*” of the hubble-bubble kept time with the “*ghnan—ghnan—ghnan*” of the *charká*, and the two together evoked a melody which the immortals might have heard with rapture. At last Badan broke the divine harmony.

Badan. “Mother, I have for some time past been thinking of speaking to you on a certain subject.”

Alanga. "What subject, Bábá Badan? Has anything happened? Is anything troubling your mind? Do tell me what it is."

Badan. "Nothing has happened, but I wish to speak to you about Govin."

Alanga. "What about Govin, my son? Is the child sick? Is anything the matter with him?"

Badan. "Don't you think, mother, it would be a good thing to give Govin his *háte khadí*? It is a great drawback that I cannot either read or write. I cannot read a *pátí* (pottah) or write a *kabúliyat*; I cannot even sign my name: I am obliged, owing to my ignorance, to put a *dhendí* (a cross) for my signature. Though I have eyes, I cannot see. I am at the mercy of every deceitful *gomastá*, and of every tyrannical zamindár. Don't you think it would be a capital thing to teach Govin *lekhá-paḍá* (writing and reading)?"

Alanga. "Oh, Bábá Badan! don't talk of *lekhá-paḍá*. Your elder brother was sent to *páthśálá* (school) by your father, contrary to my wishes. And what was the consequence? The gods took him

away from us after he had been to school only one year. Reading and writing do not suit poor people like us. I fear the gods will take away Govin also (the son of Shashthi! may he live for ever!) if you send him to school."

Badan. "Oh, mother, what an idea! Who ever heard of reading and writing killing a child? Why are not Bráhmaṇ and káyastha boys who learn reading and writing also killed?"

Alanga. "The gods do not become angry with Bráhmaṇ and káyastha boys for learning, because that is their profession. But our business is to till the ground, and if we become so ambitious as to learn reading and writing, the gods will certainly become angry with us."

Badan. "But do you not know, mother, that some Aguris, men of our caste, know how to read and to write? Does not Naṭavara Sámanta read and write? Is not Madhu Sinha a *moharir* (writer)? Why have the gods not killed them?"

Alanga. "Whatever it may be with other people, writing and reading do not seem to agree with our family. If that be not the case, why did your

brother die shortly after he had begun to go to school? Answer that."

Badan. "Why, as to death, mother, that is the decree of fate. Whatever is written on the forehead by Vidhátá Purusha must come to pass. Vidhátá had written on my brother's head that he would die when seven years old, and therefore he died; and he would have died at that age whether my father had sent him to school or not. The quantity of rice with which he had come into the world was finished, and therefore he died. It is fate, mother, it is fate."

Alanga. "Quite true, Bábá Badan, the forehead is the chief thing. Why, then, should you fight against the forehead? We have been born tillers of the ground, and we must remain tillers of the ground all our life. Besides, did your fathers ever learn to write and to read? Why should you wish your son to do what your forefathers never did?"

Badan. "The days in which our fathers lived were days of piety and virtue. That was the *Satya-Yuga*. There was no cheating, no oppression in those days. Writing and reading, therefore, were

not essentially necessary. But in our days, men have become very deceitful—they fear neither gods nor men. It is necessary to learn to read and to write, that we may not be cheated and oppressed.”

Alanga. “You men can talk a great deal, and bring a great many reasons for what you say. What can a woman say before a man? Do what you think best, Bábá Badan; I am only afraid that he may be taken away by the gods like your elder brother. It is far better for poor Govin to get his daily rice by tending cows in the field, than to learn to read and write and then die.”

Badan. “I have told you, mother, that life and death are in the hands of the gods. If it be written on Govin’s forehead that he will die (may the gods make him immortal!) on such a day it will come to pass, whether he be sent to school or not, as no one can reverse the writing on the forehead. I beg of you, mother, to agree to sending Govin to the *páthśalá* of Ráma Rúpa Sarkár: I prefer his school to the other, as he is well versed in zamindár, accounts. Do agree to it, mother.”

Alanga. “If you will have it so Bábá Badan,

then send him. May Gopinath preserve him ! But if he is to be sent to school, you must wait a few days till I spin some more thread, sufficient to make for Govin a *dhuti*."

Badan, overjoyed at his mother's consent, readily agreed to the delay.

Gentle reader, allow me here to make one remark. You perceive that Badan and Alanga speak better English than most uneducated English peasants ; they speak almost like educated ladies and gentlemen, without any provincialisms. But how could I have avoided this defect in my history ? If I had translated their talk into the Somersetshire or the Yorkshire dialect, I should have turned them into English, and not Bengali, peasants. You will, therefore, please overlook this grave though unavoidable fault in this authentic narrative.

CHAPTER X.

THE FIVE - FACED .

He foams at mouth ; and, by-and by,
Breaks out to savage madness.

Othello.

I SAID in the last chapter that nothing worthy of notice occurred during the first five years of Govinda's life. I beg now to recall that statement, as I have been since informed that a notable event happened when he was about five years old ; whether it was towards the end of his fifth year or the beginning of the sixth I have not been able exactly to ascertain, but it did happen about that time. Alanga always remembered that it happened on a Saturday, but the month and the year escaped her memory. I have to throw myself upon the indulgence of

the reader for the absence of minute chronological accuracy in this notable event of Govinda's life.

Well, upon a Saturday some time about the fifth or sixth year of Govinda's age, something extraordinary happened to him. He was standing near his mother in the yard when he suddenly fell down, threw his arms and legs about in an extraordinary manner, foamed at the mouth, tore his hair, and seemed altogether to be wrought up into a state of perfect frenzy. Sundari shrieked, which brought Alanga and Áduri to the spot. Alanga, observing Govinda's convulsions, and the contortions which his body was undergoing, at once inferred the cause, and weeping said—"Oh, mother, my child is possessed by *Pencho*!"

What is *Pencho*? the reader will ask. *Pencho* is a colloquial abbreviation of Panchánana—literally, the five-faced, one of the gods of the Hindu pantheon, a form of the all-destroying Śiva. The image of this divinity, when properly represented, is a monster in the shape of a man with five faces and fifteen eyes—each face containing three eyes. This image of the god, however, is not usually made, owing, we:

presume, to his hideous appearance. He is generally worshipped in the shape of a stone, painted red at the top, anointed with oil, and placed under a *raṭa* or *asvatha* tree. There is scarcely a Hindu village in Lower Bengal on the outskirts of which there are not one or more trees, at the foot of which such stones are worshipped under the name of Panchánana. Among the three hundred and thirty millions of Hindu deities of both genders, there is none which is more dreaded by Hindu mothers than this five-faced and fifteen-eyed demon. Though the god has his good points, since he is pleased sometimes to make barren women prolific, he is in general regarded as exceedingly irritable and malignant; and so fiery is he in temperament that, if any children, playing under the tree where the painted stone is placed, happened accidentally to touch it, the demon would immediately possess them, and throw them into convulsions. Alanga concluded in her mind that Govinda must have that day, while playing with other cow-boys at the Panchánanatalá (that is, the foot of Panchánana's tree), touched the divinity, or unwittingly shown some disrespect to him; and that there-

fore the god, by way of punishment, had taken possession of him. Conceiving this to be the case, she asked the child, then writhing in agony, "Father, who are you? Why have you possessed my Govin? Are you a god or a ghost?" The child, or rather the demon in the child, answered: "I am Panchánana; your child put his foot on my image. I am going to break his neck and to suck his blood." The women set up a loud cry, which brought all the women and children of the neighbourhood into the house. Alanga, who had greater presence of mind than the rest, said to the god, "O Thákur! Panchárana! forgive this child and get out of him; for he is but a child, thoughtless, senseless, without any knowledge of what is right or wrong. O Thakur! (god) O Thákur! forgive Govin, and we will do *pújá* (worship) to you." After these words were uttered, the child had a more violent fit than before, and the women set up a louder cry than ever. Notice was sent to the child's father and uncles, who were working in the fields. They came home, running in breathless haste, and saw the child foaming at the mouth, and tearing his hair. What

was to be done ? Some Bráhmāni women, who were present, proposed the immediate celebration of the *pújá* of Panchánana, as the only means of appeasing the incensed deity. Rám Dhan Misri, the family priest, was sent for. When he came, he confirmed the opinion of the Bráhmāni women, that Panchánana's *pújá* must be immediately performed. No time was lost in making the necessary preparations. Taking the sick child with them, they went to the outskirts of the village, and stood under a *raṭa* tree, where was lying a large stone painted red, and anointed with oil. At the moment of their arrival there, Govinda had another of his epileptic fits. The priestly Misri commenced worshipping the demon by the repetition of *mantras* (prayers) ; flowers, fruit, and sweetmeats were offered, and the women bawled out their loudest—as if the god was deaf—beseeching him to take pity upon them, and to come out of the child. Govinda, too, was made to bow down several times before the stone, and to beat his head on the ground. The god was again and again plied with entreaties, with flatteries, with promises of future presents, and *pújá*, and it seemed that the coaxing

had its effect, for the fit suddenly came to an end. The women now thanked the god for his favour, and went away to their house. We state, on the authority of Alanga, that, after this time, Govinda had no return of epilepsy.

CHAPTER XI.

HOUSEHOLD MATTERS.

The *cow-house* yields a stercoraceous heap.

Cowper.


SINCE the conversation which took place between Alanga and Badan on the education of Govinda, the old lady was observed to be busier with her *charkú* than usual. All the forenoon she was engaged, along with Sundari and Áduri, in the affairs of the house and in cooking; but she devoted the whole of the afternoon to spinning. What I mean by the affairs of the house perhaps requires a word of explanation. When the women got out of their beds, which they did always at crow-cawing—I cannot say cock-crowing, for there was no cock, not only in the house, but hardly any in the village, as cocks and hens are abomination to Hindus—they went to the

side of the tank near the house, which served all necessary purposes. They then made a solution of cow-dung and water, and sprinkled the liquid by the hand on the open yard, which was next swept by a broom made of the stalks of palm-trees. But the rooms and the verandahs require to be cleansed and washed in another fashion. As the flooring was entirely of earth, there being not a single brick or stone in the house, or a plank of wood either, every inch of the floor of every room was besmeared by means of a piece of rag, with the said solution of cow-dung and water, and allowed to dry itself. The reader may think that this is a dirty business, and that the rooms must be the worse for being thus besmeared. But he is mistaken. He may take our word that the floor greatly improves by the process. It becomes smooth and glossy, and no cracks are visible. And as for any disgusting smell, there is nothing of the sort—the smell, if any, being positively pleasant. Hindu peasants besmear their cottages with a solution of cow-dung and water, because cow-dung is regarded ceremonially as a purifier; it is, however, a question

why Hindu law-givers should have pitched upon cow-dung as a purifier. Has it any sanitary value? Has it any disinfecting property? From the universal practice of the Hindus of Bengal, I should be inclined to think that cow-dung was a disinfectant; but I prefer to leave the matter in the hands of doctors and chemists.

Our women, however, have not yet done with cow-dung. There is a large heap of it lying in a corner of the yard, partly obtained from the cow-house and partly collected the previous day by Gayáram, whose business is not only to tend the cows, but to collect whatever cow-dung he may find in the fields, either from his own cows or from those of other people, and a basketful of which valuable substance he every evening brings home on his head. On this heap Alanga, Sundari, and Áduri now fell. They put a little water on it, kneaded it as a baker kneads his dough; and each went with a basketful to the sunny sides of the walls of their huts, and covered them with cakes made by the palms of their hands. These cow-dung cakes, when they become dry, are of great use: they are

the only fuel of the family. From year's end to year's end they do not buy fire-wood; for cooking and for keeping a fire in the cow-house they use no other fuel than what is afforded by the cow.

To a Bengal peasant the cow is the most useful of all animals. The cow supplies the newly-born infant with food for some years; the cow—or rather the bull, but it is the same thing—tills the ground on which the ráiyat's food grows; the cow brings home on its back that food, when it is ready, from the fields; the cow furnishes the peasant-family with the only fuel they have; The cow provides the peasant with curds, sour-milk, and whey; and the cow gives that *ghi* (clarified butter) which is so grateful to the palate and nostrils of Hindu gods and Bengali Bábus. After this, is it to be wondered that the cow should be greatly respected by Hindus and worshipped as “Mother  agavati?”

After the sweeping and cleansing of the house are over, the women have to go through other domestic duties, such as boiling paddy and drying it in the sun, with a view to turn it into rice, and scouring at the tank all the brass and stone pots

and pans, and the like. Ablution comes next, after which commences the serious operation of cooking, in which Alanga takes the leading part. After all have eaten, and some food has been sent, if necessary, to the fields for the gentlemen of the house, Alanga sits down to her breakfast, or dinner, or supper, anything you choose to call it, for she, as a widow, takes only one meal in twenty-four hours, and does not seem to be any the worse for it. It was only after this meal, which took place generally about two or three o'clock in the afternoon, that Alanga could sit to her *charká*; but long practice had made her an adept in the craft, so that in the course of a few days she spun a quantity of thread sufficient to make for Govinda a *dhuti* five cubits long, and a cubit and half broad. Alanga did not herself weave the cloth, as she was unacquainted with the art; it was woven by the weaver of the northern division of the village, for which he received his usual fee.

The day on which Govinda was for the first time taken to the *páthśúlú* was an important day to the family, as well as to our hero himself. Though, unlike

the middle and higher classes, who seldom send a child to school for the first time without performing some religious ceremonies, the poorer classes ask not the ministrations of the Bráhmaṇ, yet the matter is regarded with the liveliest interest. Ever since his birth, Govinda has not had a stitch of clothing on his person; though more than five years old, he was allowed to revel in the unrestrained freedom of primæval nudity. It was on the morning of that important day that his grandmother wrapped round his waist, in folds, the *dhuti* of which I have spoken, leaving the rest of the body—which was nearly the whole—quite naked. Thus dressed, our little man bowed down to the ground before his grandmother, his mother, his father, uncles, and aunt, and they all gave him their benedictions. As on the very first day he was expected at the *paṭhśālā* to commence writing, Badan tied in one corner of Govinda's *dhuti*, a piece of chalk, or rather *rámkhaḍi*, and Alanga, ever on the alert to minister to the wants and comforts of every member of the family, put in one of the folds of the *dhuti*, a quantity of *mudī* (fried rice), in such a way that Govinda could

easily dip his hand into it whenever he felt himself hungry. Thus accoutred, our young soldier was ready to begin his attack on the realms of knowledge. Badan took Govinda by the hand, and repeating three times the words, “Śirī Hari! Śirī Hari! Śirī Hari!” left the house for the *paṭhśālā*, a description of which place, and of its presiding genius, we must reserve for the next chapter.

CHAPTER XII.

THE VILLAGE SCHOOLMASTER.

The village all declared how much he knew,
'Twas certain he could write, and cypher too ;
Lands he could measure, terms and tides presage,
And even the story ran—that he could gauge.

The Deserted Village.

THE reader will remember that, in the middle of the village of Kánchanpur, there are two temples of Śiva facing each other, and that one of those temples has before it a colonnade. In this colonnade was held the village *páṭhśálá*, properly so called, where the sons of Bráhmans, Káyasthas, and wealthy bankers received instruction from a Bráhman *gurumahásaya*. This *gurumahásaya*, or *mahásaya*,—as he is usually called in the Burdwan district—belonged to a race of hereditary pedagogues, since his father, grandfather, great-grandfather, and all his ancestors up to

the fourteenth generation backwards, were the schoolmasters of the village. There was in the village, however, another pedagogue whose school bore to the other one the same relation which a dissenting chapel in England bears to the parish church. He occupied a far inferior social position: indeed he was not a Bráhmaṇ, but a Káyastha, and therefore obtained only a third part of the pupils of the other. Any day you might have seen in the school of the Bráhmaṇ pedagogue between sixty and seventy boys, whereas in the other school you seldom saw more than twenty. And yet the Bráhmaṇ was by no means a better teacher than the Káyastha. The former, though he had read a part of the *Saṅkshipta-Sára*—the Sanskrit grammar in vogue in the Vardhamána district—and would repeat a lot of Sanskrit *ślokas* with which his conversation was interlarded, yet made ludicrous mistakes in Bengali orthography; the latter made no pretensions to Sanskrit scholarship, but was universally acknowledged to be an arithmetician of the first water; and he was strong in zamindári accounts, a subject of which the Bráhmaṇ *mahásāya* had no knowledge. Though the school

of the Káyastha teacher was attended chiefly by the lower castes and the poorer classes, there was amongst them a sprinkling of Bráhmaṇ boys, particularly those whose parents wished to give them a mathematical education and an insight into the mysteries of zamindári accounts. Badan preferred the Káyastha to the Bráhmaṇ teacher for two reasons:—*first*, because the school of the latter was the more aristocratic of the two, and he wished his son to be educated along with those who were his equals in social position, or at any rate, not very much higher, and *secondly*, because he wanted Govinda to learn zamindári accounts. Accordingly Badan and Govinda proceeded to the house of Ráma Rúpa Sarkára (for that was the name of the Káyastha pedagogue), who held his school in the yard of his house, in the shade of an umbrageous *Kántúla* tree (jack tree), excepting in the rainy season, when he removed it to the verandah of his cottage.

“Well, Badan, what is the news? what brings you here?” asked Ráma Rúpa seated on a mat before about a dozen pupils variously engaged in writing on paper, or plantain-leaf or palm-leaf.

Badan. “You see, *mahásaya*, this boy of mine ; I wish to put him under you, that you may make a man of him.”

Ráma. “Well done ! *Badan* ! You wish your son taught *lekhá-padá*, a thing you don’t know yourself ! Well, you are right. The poet *Chánakya* says—*Vidyáratna mahadhanam*, that is to say, learning or education is a great treasure.”

Badan. “Yes, sir, that’s quite true. A man who cannot read and write is a truly poor man—he is blind. Though I have two eyes, I am really blind, for I cannot read what is written on a bit of paper.”

Ráma. “*Badan*, you had better sit down, and smoke. *Modo* ! go and make tobacco ready.”

Badan sat down on the bare ground, *Govinda* stood near him, and *Madhu*, one of the advanced pupils of the school, went away to get tobacco and fire for his teacher. In Bengal, and I suppose in other parts of India, pupils, especially in the villages, do, without a grudge, even menial services for their teacher ; indeed, they regard it as an honourable distinction to be so employed. Turning to *Govinda*, the *mahásaya*

said, "Well, my little man, so you want to be a *Pandit*. Come near me." Poor Govinda trembled from head to foot. He had heard from boys of his own age that every schoolmaster was a second Yama or Rhadamanthus, and every school a place where boys were unmercifully flogged. He therefore hesitated to go near Ráma Rúpa; but Badan shoved him forwards to the pedagogue, who patted him on the head and told him to be a good boy, and not to be afraid of his teacher. One of the advanced pupils was then ordered to trace on the ground the first five letters of the Bengali alphabet. Badan took out the *rámkhadi* from his boy's clothes, and put it into his hand. Ráma Rúpa took hold of Govinda's hand, with the chalk in it, and led it over all the letters traced on the ground. In the meantime, the advanced pupil, Madhu, brought the hookah reeking with the fragrant weed, and put it into the hands of Ráma Rúpa. As Badan and Ráma Rúpa were of different castes, they could not smoke in the same hookah. The latter therefore gave to the former the earthen cup called *kalki*, which contains the tobacco and the fire, and Badan grasped the lower part of

it with both his hands, and smoked away through the opening between the thumb and the forefinger of his right-hand. After he had smoked two or three minutes he returned the *kalki* to the *mahāśaya*, who began to puff away with great zest.

As the redoubtable pedagogue of Kānchanpur, now in the act of smoking, is in a state of repose—and tobacco, they say, is a wonderful sedative—we shall make an attempt to photograph his likeness, which is not always practicable, especially when, urged by a tempest of passion—as was frequently the case—his body trembles in every inch with rage, and his cane descends, thump after thump, with electric rapidity, on the backs of his unfortunate pupils. From the form of one of his legs, and the position in which it was put, you might have inferred that he was lame, and the inference would have been confirmed by the sight of a crutch that lay beside him. His lameness, to say the truth, was of no ordinary kind; he could with difficulty go, with the help of his crutch, from one room of his house to another; and, as for going out into the street, he scarcely went out even once in six months. Owing to

this bodily defect, he was always called *khondú mahá-saya*, that is, the lame schoolmaster, in contra-distinction to the Bráhmaṇ pedagogue. His pupils often lent him a helping hand in going from room to room, and sometimes, I am sorry to say, assisted him to a fall, as a sort of retaliation for the caning they so frequently received from him. He was about forty years old, had a dark skin, a spare body, an aquiline nose, and a rather high forehead for a Bengali. He stooped a great deal. In addition to his lameness, he had another bodily defect, which considerably marred his influence, and made him often an object of derision—he spoke through his nose. When narrating the conversation he had with Badan, we found it impossible to represent his nasal intonation in the English language, though it would have been quite easy in Bengali. In uttering the words, “how do you do?” Ráma Rúpa would say—“*know dno ynou dno?*” His nasal twang was so strong, that, if he were speaking at night in a dark room, he might be mistaken by children for a ghost—for Bengali ghosts speak strongly through the nose.

But though a hopeless cripple as regards his body, and ghost-like in his speech, Ráma Rúpa had natural talents of no mean order. He was the first mathematician in the village. He had not only Subhankara, the Indian Cocker, at his fingers' ends, but was acquainted with the elements of the Vījaganita or Algebra. There was, indeed, another mathematician in the village who looked down upon the pedagogue with perfect contempt—and that is our friend Dhumketu, the astrologer; but there was this difference between the two geniuses, that whereas the astrologer dealt in celestial mathematics, the schoolmaster applied his mathematics to things terrestrial. But Ráma Rúpa was not only mathematical, he was eminently logical. Though he had not read the *Sútras* of Gotama, he was an acute reasoner. Whenever the Christian missionary of Vardhamána came to the village in the course of his itineracy, he did not fail to pay a visit to the lame schoolmaster, who had many a tough argument with him; and the villagers always thought that the missionary was invariably worsted. Indeed, his reputation for

logical subtlety was so great that it might be truly said of him that

He was in logic a great critic,
Profoundly skill'd in analytic ;
He could distinguish and divide
A hair 'twixt south and south-west side ;
On either which he would dispute,
Confute, change hands, and still confute.

Rāma Rúpa was a strict disciplinarian. He had by him constantly, besides his crutch, a thin but longish twig of bamboo, which often resounded, not only on the palms of his pupils' hands, but on their heads and backs ; and sometimes also with cruel ingenuity he used to strike their knuckles, their knee-joints, and their ankles. You could hardly pass by the door of the house during school hours without hearing the *shop-a-shop, shop-a-shop* of the bamboo switch. But he had other ways of administering discipline. One famous mode of juvenile punishment was called *náḍu-Gopál*, that is, Gopál (the god Krishna) with a sweetmeat in his hand. This consisted in making a boy sit on the ground with one leg in a kneeling posture ; the two

arms were then stretched, and a large brick was placed on each. In this posture a boy is expected to remain still for several hours. Should either of the bricks fall from the hand, down comes the bamboo switch on the pate of the delinquent. We shall mention only one other clause in Rāma Rūpa's penal code. The juvenile offender was handcuffed, and his feet were tied by strings to the trunk of the jack tree of which we have spoken. While the boy thus stood handcuffed and chained, the leaves of a stinging plant called *bichhuti* (*Tragia involu-crata*) were applied to different parts of his body. Whoever has been stung by a wasp or a hornet can have some idea of the sensation produced by the application of *bichhuti* to the skin. The agony is intense: perfectly helpless, unable to run away, unable even to stroke with his hand the part stung, the boy can do nothing but shriek. In justice to the lame schoolmaster of Kānchanpur, I should here remark that the above disciplinary process was not the product of his own fertile brain; it is a time-honoured institution which has been handed down from generation to generation of Bengali village schoolmasters.

A few words on Ráma Rúpa's finances will conclude this chapter. The schooling fee was, on the average, one *anna* (a penny and halfpenny) a month per boy. Supposing he had thirty or thirty-two boys—I don't believe he ever had more—his monthly income would amount to two rupées, or four shillings. Besides this, he had a system of "requisitions." Most of the boys, when they came to the afternoon school—for the school was held first from early in the morning till about eleven o'clock, and again from three o'clock in the afternoon till candle-light—brought from their houses for their teacher either a betel-leaf, or a betel-nut, or a small ball of tobacco. In addition to these daily donations, every boy was expected to give to the *mahásaya* once a month a *sidá*, which consisted of a quantity of unboiled rice, with a suitable accompaniment of vegetables, split pulse, mustard oil, salt, and even clarified butter. All this, no doubt, made a considerable addition to his income of four shillings a month, yet it was quite insufficient to support the pedagogue, his wife and two children; the deficiency was supplied by the produce of about ten *bighás*

of land which, as he was unable to cultivate them himself, he held in partnership with a neighbouring husbandman.

Such was the celebrated pedagogue of Kánchanpur, at whose feet Govinda was made to sit for instruction. What progress our hero makes in his studies, and how long he remains in the school, will form the subject of a future chapter; but in the meantime the attention of the reader must be drawn to some other matters.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MATCH MAKER.

That night the envoy, entertained
With honour and all care, remained.

Griffith's *Rámáyana*.

I THINK I hear my English reader exclaim—"What a fool of a writer this novelist is! An orthodox novel generally ends in a marriage, but this fellow talks of a match maker, and consequently of a wedding, before he has well begun his story." Well, my defence against this grave charge is, that I cannot help it. Málati must now get married, whether I wish it or not. The customs of the country require it. Málati is already more than eleven years old, and people are blaming Badan for not having given her away in marriage. Often has Alanga shed tears at the remarks made by the women of the village,

especially at the bathing *ghát*, where women hold conversations on all sorts of subjects. Some of the women have sometimes told her — “Well, Alanga, when is Málati going to get married? She is becoming quite a big girl. Dear me, she is shooting up like a plantain-tree! and you are taking no thought of her marriage!” The fact is, Indian legislators insist on the marriage of a girl before she attains the age of puberty, and as that seldom takes place, in a tropical climate like Bengal, later than in the twelfth year, the maximum age at which a girl can remain unmarried is eleven years. Badan would have long ago given away his daughter in marriage but for the expenses it was sure to entail, and which he was ill able to afford. But matters have now come to a crisis. Whether he has means or not, the girl must be married off, otherwise he would become a proverb and a hissing among his fellow-villagers. As to the ways and means, he must beg or borrow, it being out of the question for so respectable a ráiyat as Badan to have recourse to the other alternative of stealing. I cannot say he was ashamed to beg — a Bengal ráiyat seldom shows such a sense of

delicacy—but if he did beg, few people would respond to the call. Recourse must therefore be had to borrowing; and Badan was sure of getting the loan of any reasonable sum from his *maháján*, Golak Poddár, the money-lender of the village, who charges interest generally at the rate of one hundred per cent. and sometimes one hundred and fifty per cent. per annum, but who takes from his especial favourites—amongst whom Badan had the felicity to be numbered—only seventy-five per cent. It was resolved to borrow, and enquiries were set on foot in search of an eligible young man on whom to bestow the hand of Málati.

One evening, after Badan, Kálamánik, Gayarám, and the cows had come home from the fields, and while Alanga was going about with a lamp in her hand from room to room, and scaring away the ghosts and evil spirits of every description, which might seek shelter for the night in any room which had been unvisited in the evening, even for a minute or two, by any sort of light, a stranger entered the house and stood in the yard. Badan at once recognized the stranger and said—"Hullo! here is the

ghatak. I am glad you have come; I hope you have brought good news. Málati, bring a *ghaṭi* of water for the *ghatak* to wash his feet with. Gayáram, go and get the hookah ready." In a moment the water was brought, with which the *ghatak* washed his feet. In a minute or two the hookah was brought and he went on puffing at a great rate.

But what *is* a *ghatak*? the English reader asks. Though this gentleman bears a name extremely guttural in sound, his occupation is about the pleasantest in the world. To spinsters and bachelors the sound of his name is more musical than Apollo's lute. He is the professional match maker, and therefore an under-servant of Kámadeva, the Indian Cupid. As in India, young men and young women do not themselves choose their partners in life, they have to depend on the good offices of this happy functionary, who, however, bears his commission not from the parties themselves, but from their parents and guardians. We have said that his occupation is one of the pleasantest in the world; and what occupation can be more pleasant than to be daily conversant with amiable bridegrooms, and blooming

brides, to tie the knot of holy matrimony, and to be thus instrumental in the promotion of human happiness? This worthy functionary's character is as amiable as his occupation is pleasant. He possesses the highest Christian virtue in perfection, inasmuch as he possesses an unlimited measure of that charity which covers a multitude of sins. He has never been known to find any fault with any young man or young woman of marriageable age. The spinster may be as ugly as one of Shakspeare's witches, and the young man may be as deformed as deformity itself, the *ghataṭak* sees no defect in either. The one, in his eye, or at any rate in his mouth, is as beautiful and gentle as Lákshmi, and the other as handsome and accomplished as Kártikeya. The reader must not suppose that the gentleman now smoking in Badan's house is a *ghataṭak*, in the proper sense of the term. A *ghataṭak*, properly speaking, is a Bráhmaṇ of a very high order, and confines his services only to the priestly class. A Bráhmaṇ *ghataṭak* is often a man of learning, and invariably a man of persuasive eloquence; and he has the whole of the Indian "Burke's Peerage" and "Baron-

etage," at his fingers' ends. But every caste has its own *ghaṭaks*; and the worthy individual now before us is a *ghaṭak* of the ugra-kshatriya, or Aguri caste. He had been commissioned by Badan and Alanga to seek out a nice young husband for Málati; he had had, before this time, several interviews with them, and with the parents of the young man of his choice; and he had now come to make the final arrangements. What those arrangements were, and who the happy young man was that was to obtain the hand of Málati, the reader will know from the conversation, a translation of which we give below.

· *Badan*. "Well, *ghaṭak*, what's the news? I hope everything is *pákú* (ripe)."

Ghaṭak. "All *pákú*, by the blessing of Prajapati. Your daughter Málati must have been born in an auspicious hour to get such a handsome, able-bodied, and accomplished husband as Mádhava Chandra Sen, the son of Keśava Chandra Sen, of Durgánagar, the highest ugra-kshatriya *kulín* in all Rádh."

Badan. "You *ghaṭaks* always praise everybody. But tell me truly whether the young man has any bodily defect."

Ghaṭak. "Rāma! Rāma! do you think I am joking with you? Mádharma is a second Kártikeya, the handsomest young man in all Durgánagar. As for his property, his father, old Keśava, has two *marúis* (granaries of paddy); of his brass vessels there is no reckoning. Besides the lands for which he pays rent, he has ten *bighás* of *lákhráj* (rent-free) land."

Alanga. "What ornaments have they agreed to give to Málati?"

Ghaṭak. "Old Keśava will cover his daughter-in-law's body with ornaments from head to foot. He has ordered one *chaubrahár*, a pair of *mals*, a pair of *painchhás*, one *báuṭi*, a pair of *palákúñtis*, one *tabij*, a pair of *jhumkos* and *pásús*, a pair of *bálús*, and one *nath*. Did you, old lady, get so many ornaments at your wedding?"

Alanga. "Why, when I got married, *ghaṭak*, people were not so fond of ornaments as they are now. Those days were days of simplicity, of thick clothes and coarse rice; but the present days are days of luxury."

Badan. "What is Mádharma's exact age?"

Chatak. “He is nineteen years, ten months, and five days old; I saw his horoscope.”

Badan. “I hope his *gotra* (the name of his tribe), is different from ours.”

Ghatak. “Well done! Do you, Badan, take me for a fool? I have become grey in *ghatkālī*, (that is, the profession of a *ghatak*), and you teach me my trade!”

Alanga. “We have no objection to the marriage. Let measures be immediately taken. Málati has evidently put rice in the *húndī* of Mádhava. It seems to be the tying of Prajapati. Who can prevent the union?”

The *ghatak*, delighted with the result of the conversation, took some refreshment, laid himself down on a mat on the verandah of the big room, and, as he had become tired by the day's walk, soon fell asleep.

CHAPTER XIV.

MALATI'S MARRIAGE.

Here Sítá stands, my daughter fair,
The duties of thy life to share ;
Take from her father, take thy bride,
Join hand to hand, and bliss betide.
A faithful wife, most blest is she,
And as thy shade will follow thee.

GRIFFITH'S *Rámdyana*.

EARLY next morning the *ghaṭak* rose from his bed before crow-cawing, and started on his journey to Durgánagar, which was about twenty miles distant. The way was long and tedious, but the prospect of a substantial reward considerably lightened the fatigue of the journey. He did not stop in the way, except a minute or two here and there for the purpose of smoking; and the only considerable halt he made was on the banks of the brook Máýá,

where he bathed, ate the *muḍi* and treacle which Alanga with thoughtful kindness had put into his bundle, and drank from the stream, the water of which is so wholesome that it is said to possess the rare quality of dissolving even iron shots if they are taken into the stomach. "The lowing herds wind slowly over the lea," kicking up as they went a cloud of dust, and the ploughman was plodding homeward his weary way, when the *ghaṭak* reached Durgánagar. Keśava Sen and his wife rejoiced at the success of the match maker, and looked forward to their son's marriage with great pleasure.

Two days after, Keśava set out for Kánchanpur with a distant relation, who carried with him a pair of *sáḍis* and a *húṇḍi* of the best sweetmeats manufactured at Durgánagar. Badan received the guests with joy. Keśava was delighted with the beauty and sweet simplicity of Málati, and *vágdán*, or betrothal, was consummated. As the parents of both bride and bridegroom were anxious that the marriage should be soon celebrated, Dhumketu, the astrologer, was requested to fix a day for the purpose. After a world of calculations he fixed

upon the 24th of Phálgun, which he represented to be eminently auspicious, as the solar, lunar, planetary, and stellar influences on that day were all benignant. After two days Keśava and his friend returned to Durgánagar.

Two weeks before the wedding, the sound of festivity and the din of preparations were heard both at Kánchanpur and Durgánagar. The relations of Badan, whether near or distant, whether residing in the village or elsewhere, all flocked to his house to mingle their gratulations with his; and those near relations who had come from distant villages, stayed till the solemnities were all over. Preparations were made for feeding a large number of persons, consisting of Badan's own relations and friends, and of those of the bridegroom. The pedal was incessantly active, husking away large quantities of paddy; the hand-mill was always in motion, splitting *kalái*, *arhar*, and other sorts of pulse; advances of money were given to the fishermen of the village for a good supply of the only animal food used by the Hindu peasantry—the fish of Badan's own tank being insufficient for the purpose; and con-

tracts were given to the village milkmen for huge quantities of curds, of which Bengal ráiyats are so fond. Alanga, Sundari, Áduri, and the women of neighbouring houses, busied themselves also with the clothes and ornaments of Málati; while the young women of the village put their heads together to concoct plans for amusing and teasing the bridegroom on the night of the wedding. In every Bengali marriage *haridrú* (turmeric), plays an important part; indeed, without it, there can be no marriage. What the philosophy of using turmeric in marriage is, we do not pretend to fathom; perhaps it is used to improve the complexion, which in Bengal is rather dark. Whatever may be the reason, turmeric is largely used in all Bengali marriages. Accordingly, a large quantity of turmeric was ground, and reduced to powder by Alanga and Sundari; the body of Málati was profusely besmeared with the yellow dye, mixed with mustard oil; and other members of the family, as well as relatives and neighbours, beautified their persons with it. Great was the exultation of the women when the nuptial drug was for the first time applied to the skin of the would-be bride.

Shouts of *ulu ! ulu ! ulu !* rent the air ; and those shouts were repeated every forenoon when the operation of besmearing the body with turmeric took place, before bathing. The din of preparation, the sound of festivity, the loud talk and laughing of the women, the turmeric-coloured clothes of every one connected with the family, and the shouts of *ulu ! ulu ! ulu !*—all showed to the little world of Kánchanpur that there was to be a marriage in Badan's house.

At Durgánagar the sound of festivity was still greater. Every morning the *chandimandap* of Keśava's house was crowded with people, old and young, who talked of nothing else but of Mádhava's marriage. About ten o'clock in the morning, the shouts of *ulu ! ulu ! ulu !* from the *andarmahal* (Zenana) announced to the public of the village that the would-be bridegroom's body was being besmeared with turmeric. A great deal of fun was made, many jokes were cracked by old and young women, as Mádhava's body was anointed with oil and turmeric. Ablutions then followed. During these days, the bridegroom ate what is called, *anúḍhabhojana*, commonly termed

áibaḍabhát, or bachelor's dinner. Those dinners are given by the near relations of the bridegroom, and are so termed from the circumstance that they are amongst the last dinners the bridegroom eats in the condition of a bachelor. They are usually accompanied with a deal of fun and festivity, made chiefly by young men and young women. When Mádhava sat with his companions in the *chandimandap*, the *ghaṭak* would come and descant eloquently on the nameless graces of Málati, to the infinite amusement of the party, and institute a droll comparison between the forthcoming marriage, and the union of Mádhava and Málati in the Sanskrit play of that name. Business was, however, mingled with these merry-makings. As Mádhava was Keśava's only son, the father had resolved to spend as much money as he possibly could in celebrating the marriage. Accordingly, a costly dress for the bridegroom had been purchased; the village *múlúkar* (flower-man) was ordered to prepare as gaudy a crown as he could make—for all Bengali bridegrooms, however poor, put on tinsel crowns at the wedding; equally gaudy shoes, embroidered with silver, had been brought up

from Calcutta; and the *chaturdolá* (marriage Pálki) of a wealthy neighbour was borrowed for the conveyance of the bridegroom to the village of the bride; torches were prepared, and a number of *rangmasúls*, "Bengal Lights" as they are called by Anglo-Indians, were manufactured to illuminate the path of the bridegroom. A band of musicians was also engaged, one set of *jagajhampa*, four *dhols*, two *kánsis*, two *súnáís*, and one set of *rasanchaukis*. This precious band used every day, several days before the wedding, to give forth harmony not unlike that which, we may suppose, was made at Babel at the Confusion of Tongues.

At last the long-looked-for day, the auspicious twenty-fourth of Phálgun, arrived. Keśava had made all necessary preparations for the marriage-march, and before the crows of the village commenced their cawing, the marriage procession had begun its journey—for the object was to reach Káchanpur in one day. The procession consisted of the bridegroom, seated in the *chaturdola*, of which I have spoken, carried by four stout bearers, his father, about a dozen relations and friends; the band of

musicians, already described; the *guru*, or spiritual director of the family; the family priest, and last, but not least in importance—the family barber. The party, without halting anywhere, made a forced march of nineteen miles, and reached Devagrāma, only one mile distant from Kānchanpur, at about three o'clock in the afternoon, where they bathed and cooked a hasty meal, and made preparations for entering the bride's village in great pomp.

But while the hymeneal party are making preparations to take Kānchanpur by storm, the reader must accompany me for a few minutes to the house of the bride, and see for himself what *her* friends are about. Since the dawning of that bright and happy day, there was infinite bustle in Badan's house. The noise of gladness was heard everywhere. Friends of every degree of amity were there; relations even to the "fortieth remove" were there; the sounds of *ulu! ulu! ulu!* were ever and anon heard; there were also the family *guru*, or father-confessor, the family *purohita* or priest, the family barber and his partner in life—the indispensable *nāpitni* (she-barber)—besides a heterogeneous mass of men and women,

old, young, and middle-aged, who were neither friends nor relations, but simple spectators. All these men and women were sitting in the open yard of the house, now covered below with a *satranja* (coarse carpet), and above by a canvas canopy, both borrowed from the zamindár of the village. But the chief object of attraction was the bride herself. The daughters and the young wives of neighbouring husbandmen had come, with one accord, and busied themselves from early dawn with adorning the person of Málati, and making her look as handsome as they could. They made a mixture of turmeric and curds, and rubbed her body well with it. She was then bathed. The girls and young women then attacked her hair, which they wove into many a fantastic braid. They then put on her person the several ornaments of which I have already spoken. The skill of the barber's wife was also had in requisition. She washed the little feet of Málati, and neatly painted them all round with *alakta* or lac. Last of all, she put on a *sáḍi* of red silk. Thus attired, she waited for the coming of the bridegroom. It was an extraordinary day for poor Málati, but she hardly

knew why her parents and friends made such an idol of her. She knew it was the day of her marriage, but what marriage was, what its duties were—of all that she knew nothing.

The sun had sunk behind the mango-tope of Devagrāma; the cows had returned from grazing, followed by neat-herds carrying baskets of cow-dung on their heads; the birds had retired to their respective trees for the night, and were squabbling among themselves for their beds; and the shades of evening had descended over all the plain, when the bridegroom's party began their festal procession. Mádhava sat in the *chaturdola*; the torches and *rangmasáls* were lit; the musicians began to play, and the jackals of the neighbouring thickets, frightened by so unusual a noise and so bright a light at such a time, set up an unearthly yell as an accompaniment to the marital music. The party assembled at Badan's house, all on the tip-toe of expectation, heard with delight the sound of the nuptial music. Badan's heart, and especially Alanga's, leaped with joy. As the sound of the music became louder and louder, the pulse of Badan and Alanga beat faster

and faster. As for Maláti, she had scarcely any feelings one way or the other, as she understood little of the matter; on the whole, I think she was sadder than usual, as she knew that she would have to leave a beloved father, a dear mother, and a still dearer grandmother, and go to a strange place with a man whom she had never seen. As the procession was approaching the village, men, women, and children ran into the street, exclaiming, "The bridegroom is coming! the bridegroom is coming!" Suddenly the music stopped at the entrance of the village. A party of the villagers had assembled there in great force, who said that they would not allow the procession to pass on till they received the fee of *dhelábhúngáni* (stoning), that is to say, the bridegroom and his party must purchase by a bribe the abstention of the villagers from throwing stones at them and breaking their vehicles and dashing out their brains. After a great deal of loud talk on both sides, the father of the bridegroom paid five rupees on the spot, after which the procession was allowed to pass on.

Shortly after, another party stopped the pro-

cession and demanded some fee for the *gráma*, or village, which was given; and a third party, composed chiefly of boys, demanded fee for the village schoolmaster. The procession at last stood at the door of Badan's house. Badan went out and welcomed them. The hero of the night, Mádhava, sat in the middle of the open yard under the canvas canopy, surrounded by a large assembly of the friends of the bride. Many hookahs went around, as almost everybody smoked. They talked on all sorts of subjects; and the pupils of Ráma Rúpa the pedagogue, who had mustered strong to witness the marriage of their schoolfellow's sister, attempted to puzzle each other with difficult questions in arithmetic, to the great amusement of the wedding party. The family barber, Gangá Nápit, was the busiest man in the whole assembly, for he was attending to the smoking of the guests, filling one *kalki* after another as soon as it was exhausted. And his amiable consort, the *Nápitni*, was of equal service amongst the women guests, who sat, crowded like bales of cotton on the verandah of the big room, not, indeed, in supplying them with tobacco—for

Hindu women do not smoke, though some of them chew tobacco-leaf with *pán*-leaf—but in enlivening the conversation and contributing to the gaiety of the scene.

At last the auspicious hour arrived—the hour on which sun, moon, planets, and stars had shed their selectest influences, and in which Mádhava and Málati were to become man and wife, when Badan, with folded hands and a sheet of cloth round his neck, in token of his humility and submission, stood in the midst of the assembly and said, “Sirs, as the *lagna* (propitious moment) has arrived, if it be the command of the assembly I shall no longer delay in beginning the good work, but shall proceed to celebrate the marriage of my daughter with Mádhava Chandra Sen, the son of Keśava Chandra Sen of Durgánagar.” Several voices cried out, “We have no objection. Begin the ceremony. And may the blessing of Prajapati descend on the bridegroom and bride.” The ceremony of *stri úchára* (or the behaviour of women, which immediately precedes that of marriage properly so called), takes place in the zenana, that is, in the inner courtyards of Hindu

houses; but, as poor people like Badan have no inner and outer yards in their houses, it takes place in the only yard they have. The *chhálnátalí* (the place where the ceremony is performed) had been prepared in that corner of the yard which was between the big hut and the pedal-hut. There was a flat wooden stool on the spot; at its four corners stood four young plantain trees, round which threads were passed. Mádhava stood on the stool, and Málati was now brought forward and whirled round the bridegroom and the plantain trees seven times. During this process, amid the exclamations of *ulu! ulu! ulu!* blows not unfrequently fell on the back of the poor bridegroom, as it is deemed unfair that a man should carry away a girl without suffering some pain. Sundari then performed what is called *baran*, that is, she took a brass plate filled with the products of the earth, and touched with it the forehead of the bridegroom. Nothing more was wanting to complete the union than the tying together of the skirts of each other's clothes, the exchange of garlands of flowers, and the repetition of holy *mantras*.

The marriage over, Badan now addressed himself

to the onerous task of providing the whole assembly with refreshments. The *Sutranja* on which they had been sitting was now taken up. A little quantity of water was sprinkled on the ground, to allay the dust; a plantain leaf was spread on the ground for each guest; boiled rice, boiled pulse, vegetable curry, fish curry, fish in tamarind, and curds, were distributed. The men ate on without speaking, the silence being now and then broken by loud cries of "Here, more fish!" "more curds on this leaf!" They all washed their hands and mouths in the adjacent tank; each got a *pán*, with the usual spices, to chew; the hookah went round and round, after which the assembly dispersed. The women were then feasted on the verandah of the big hut. The same delicacies were served up; they made less noise than the men, but I have been told that they ate more. After eating, washing their hands and mouths, and chewing *pán*, they all went away to their homes, excepting a few young women who had made up their minds to spend the rest of the night in the *vásarghar*. What that is, the reader will be told in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XV.

THE VÁSARGHAR.

Now farewell, bride, and bridegroom
Blest in thy new-found sire!
May Leto, mother of the brave,
Bring babes at your desire,
And holy Cypris either's breast
With mutual love inspire.
Theokritos.

It is not to be supposed that while the friends of the bridegroom and of the bride were entertained, the bridegroom and bride themselves should fast. But, to tell the truth, though the choicest viands—as choice viands, that is to say, as a Bengal ráiyat can procure—were set before them, they could scarcely eat anything. Intense excitement arising from the scenes enacted during the night had taken away Mádhava's appetite; and as for Málati, she

scarcely thought that what she was passing through was a reality. But there was another reason why Mádhava made a poor supper that night. The room was crowded with a number of young women whose only vocation seemed to be to amuse themselves at the expense of the bridegroom. Alanga tried to clear the room of these women, but she failed. Scarcely had Mádhava taken a handful of rice into his mouth, when one of the young women said—“Our friend Kártikeya has a beautiful set of teeth; each one is as small as a hoe, and as white as a hookah pipe,” which is usually made of ebony. Another said,—“His eyes are beautiful, exactly like those of a cat.” A third admired his nose, which was beautifully flattened at the tip. A fourth came behind and dealt such a blow on his back that it sounded like a ripe palm-fruit falling to the ground from a lofty palmyra tree; on which the women raised a loud guffaw. But the longest dinner or supper has an end, and Mádhava was removed to the *Vásarghar*.

Vásar, or *Vásarghar*, is the room in which a married couple spend their first night after marriage, or

rather the remainder of that night in which the wedding takes place. Bengalis, whether rich or poor, have no honeymoon; but the English reader of this authentic history must admit, after perusing the following account of the *vásar* night, that on that night is concentrated the honey not only of one moon but of twelve moons. Badan's bed-room, which was a compartment of the big hut, and the best room in the house, was converted into *vásarghár*. As Badan was too poor to have a *khút*, that is, a wooden bedstead with tester frames and mosquito curtains—he and all his people always sleeping on mats spread on the floor—he had borrowed from a neighbour for the newly-married couple a *taktáposa*, which may be described as a large but low kitchen table. On the *taktáposa* was spread a quilt, with two or three pillows. At the bidding of the young women, Mádhava sat on the bedstead, and the women sat on the floor on a mat, amongst whom Málati took her place. After a little, a near relation of her mother's took Málati in her arms, and made her sit on the left-hand side of Mádhava. Málati blushed, and covered her face with the skirt of her

súdi. The old women next went to the bridegroom and bride, and blessed them, invoking the gods and praying that they might lead a happy life, that they might become immortal, that they might rejoice at seeing the faces of many children, especially sons, and that their basket and their store might never fail. When this benediction was pronounced, Mádhava and Málati came down from the bedstead, and, touching the ground with their heads, made obeisance to them. Mádhava then resumed his seat on the bedstead, but Málati stayed with the women on the mat on the floor. The reader might suppose that the women would now surely retire, and leave the bridegroom and bride to themselves. Not a bit of it. Alanga came to the door and told Mádhava to go to sleep, and he would have gladly done so if the women had allowed him. One woman said, "Oh mother! what kind of marriage is this? Does any bridegroom sleep on the night of his marriage? Mádhava must sit up the rest of the night with us. The spring has just begun, and what bride or bridegroom ever thinks of sleep? Come, friends, let us all be gay." Turning to the bridegroom, the

same woman said, "Well, brother, you have got a handsome and gentle wife; I hope you will treat her well."

Mádhava. "What man ever ill-treats his wife?"

First Woman. "What man ill-treats his own wife! You must be a ninny not to know that. Are there not hundreds of cases in Kánchanpur? Here is Kádi, for instance, who is beaten almost every night by her husband."

Mádhava. "It is very wicked to beat one's wife. In my opinion no man ought, under any circumstances, to beat his wife."

First Woman. "The bridegroom seems to be a nice man. O, lo! Málati, your forehead is good. You have got such a nice husband."

Second Woman. "You seem, sister, to be in love with the bridegroom. You had better go and sit on his left hand, and we shall all cry, *ulu! ulu! ulu!* The bridegroom's words have pleased you. Now his words are honey-like, but afterwards they will turn into poison. It is the same with every bridegroom. All men are bad. They all ill-treat their wives."

Mádhava. “You seem to be speaking from personal experience.”

Second Woman. “Well done, friend! You seem to be a bit of a wit. There is some juice in you. You are not the dry stick I took you for. At first I took you for a cow; but it seems there is some stuff in you. *Sábásh!* (well done!) *Sábásh!* May you only live long!”

When these words were uttered, the other women showed some displeasure at the sarcasm, and expressed the hope that there would be nothing disagreeable on that joyful night. The woman who had spoken, however, protested that she was not at all angry, and that what she had said was all in fun.

One of the party asked Mádhava whether he could tell stories for the amusement of all; on his saying that he would greatly prefer being a listener to being a narrator, one of the young women told a story which provoked no end of laughter. When the story was drawing to a close, Mádhava unfortunately fell asleep, on which the reciter of the story, a young woman, gaily went up to the *taktáposa* and pulled his ear, which produced roars of laughter. On hearing the

cry of a cuckoo from a neighbouring tree, one of the party suggested that Mádhava should regale the company with music. Mádhava did not deny that he could sing, but said that woman's voice was a great deal sweeter than man's; he hoped, therefore, that one of the young ladies would sing. Most of the women there present could not sing at all, as it is reckoned disreputable in Bengali women, even of the peasant class, to sing; but there was one woman in the company who could sing, and she sang a love song, containing allusions to a parrot imprisoned in a cage, and longing to be free, and to soar away into the regions of delight. The voice was so sweet that it was immensely applauded. Mádhava at last yielded to the wishes of the ladies, and favoured them with a song. The song was scarcely at an end, when Alanga suddenly opened the door of the room, and said, "Son, Mádhava! the crows are cawing, it is morning, the sun will be up shortly. You had better get up and perform your morning ablutions. Where is Málati, dear?" Málati was lying on the mat in deep sleep. The women said they would not allow Mádhava to get up from

bed till they got their fee of *Sayyátoláni*, that is, for putting up the bed. After a great deal of laughter the sum of two rupées was given to the women, who put up the quilt and the pillows and went to their homes. The money they got they invested in sweet-meats. Thus ended the pleasures of the *vásarghar*, or *phulsayyá* (flower-bed), as it is more generally called in the Vardhamána district, from the circumstance of the bed being adorned with flowers. Two days after the married couple started for Durgánagar.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE VILLAGE GHOST.

I've heard my reverend grannie say,
In lanely glens ye like to stray ;
Or where auld ruin'd castles gray,
Nod to the moon,
Ye fright the nightly wand'ers 'way
Wi' eldritch croon.

Burns.

“WHY were you looking so intently on that young *Vairági* (mendicant), who came to ask alms this morning?” said Gayarám to his wife Áduri, one night on retiring into his room, and bolting the door.

Áduri. “What *Vairági*? I look at another man’s face!”

Gayarám. “What *Vairági*? as if you know nothing of the matter! You seem to have dropped from the clouds!”

Áduri. "In the name of *guru* (spiritual director), I have never gazed on any man's face except on your's. Do not accuse me falsely."

Gayáráim. "Accuse you falsely, you cunning jackal! Have I not seen it with these two eyes? The *Vairági* was standing in the middle of the yard; you came from the store-room with a handful of rice, and put it into his pumpkin; and, in the act of putting it, you looked into his face, and he looked at yours, and you gave an arch smile. I was in the cow-house, and saw it all. Dare you deny this?"

Áduri. "In the name of Gopináth (a name of Krishna), it is all false. It is true I put a handful of rice into the young *Vairági's* bag, but I deny that I looked at him and smiled."

Gayáráim. "You *did* look; you *did* smile. Don't say No. I saw it all from the cow-house."

Áduri. "You are a very suspicious husband; in other respects, you are good. You always suspect that I look into other people's faces, and that I speak to men; whereas, I never do any such thing. How many times since marriage have you suspected

me! But *Paramesvara* (God), knows that I am innocent."

Gayáram. "I am not accusing you of any positive crime. But you have a bad heart, and you always look at the faces of young men. Why don't you confess that you smiled at the young *Vairági* this morning?"

Áduri. "I did not smile. You are speaking a lie."

On this *Gayáram*'s anger was roused, and he slapped his wife on the face. *Áduri* screamed, fell down on the floor, and screamed again as if she was in danger of her life. *Alanga*, who was in the adjoining hut—the same on the verandah of which was the pedal—rushed out, and, going to the door of *Gayáram*'s hut, enquired what the matter was. On being told that nothing was the matter, only that *chhoto bou* (the younger wife) screamed simply because she was rebuked for her naughtiness, she went back into her room, advising her son to treat *Áduri* gently, and not to beat her. *Áduri*, lying flat on the ground, muttered to herself, "O *Vidhátá*, what an amount of misery hast thou written on my forehead! Happy

should I be if I die ! The air would then enter into my bones."

Gayáram. "Now confess that you smiled on the *Vairági*, and promise that you will not do it again ; then I'll forgive you."

Áduri. "In the name of *Guru*, I did not do it. Don't think evil of me, O lord of my life."

Gayáram. "Dare you again deny it, when I have told you that I have seen it with mine own eyes."

Áduri. "But suppose I did look and did smile on the *Vairági*? What of that? Have I committed any crime?"

Gayáram, with his Hindoo ideas of female delicacy, was so shocked at this outrageous answer that he got up from his bed, went to the corner where *Áduri* lay, and dealt on her back two or three vigorous fisticuffs. *Áduri* screamed again : but *Alanga* was asleep and did not hear her. There was no more conversation ; *Gayáram* slept on his bed, which was simply a mat spread on the floor ; and *Áduri*, sobbing and groaning for a long time, at last fell asleep in the place where she was lying. *Gayáram* woke up

early in the morning, took no notice of his wife, who was then fast asleep, and went to the cows.

Áduri got out of her room at the usual time, and engaged herself with Alanga and Sundari, in the ordinary household duties; Badan and Kálamánik went to the fields, whither Gayarám had already gone, and Govinda repaired to the *páthśálá* of Ráma Rúpa Mahásaya, along with other boys of the neighbourhood. Sundari bathed first, as she was now the chief cook of the family, having no baby to nurse, and Alanga being too old and infirm to undertake the work. The gentlemen of the house returned home about the middle of the day for their dinner, and Govinda returned from the *páthśálá*, his face and hands being besmeared with ink, clear proof that he had begun to write his letters in right earnest. The men took their meal first and went again to the fields; and Govinda to the afternoon school. The women then ate their dinner and, as usual, scoured the plates and dishes at the *ghát* of the tank with mud, ashes, and straw. Alanga then sat to her *charká*, and Sundari and Áduri brought drinking water from the *himaságara*,

each in an earthen *kulsi* gracefully placed on the left side of the waist, with the left arm going round its neck to support it.

It was about five o'clock in the afternoon, when Sundari and Áduri, sitting beside Alanga, were carding cotton for her, that an extraordinary scene occurred. Suddenly Áduri burst out into a loud laughter and fell down on the ground. On being raised up, she laughed still more, and began to jump about the verandah. Having never seen Áduri laugh so immoderately, Alanga and Sundari were quite confounded and ascribed her strange behaviour to the influence of *bítús* or "air"—that is, to demoniacal agency. The news of Áduri's possession ran like wildfire through the village, and reached Badan and his brothers who were in the fields. They immediately came to their house, which they found filled with a large crowd, and where they saw a sight which they had never before witnessed. The reader has been already told that it is reckoned a great sin in a Hindu (at least a Bengali Hindu woman) even to see the face of the elder brother of her husband—at any rate her eyes ought never to meet those of his.

Accordingly Áduri, since her marriage, had never looked into the face of either Badan or Kálamánik : when they were in the house she went about completely veiled. The same Áduri had now become quite a changed being. She had taken off her *sáḍi* from the head and the upper part of her body, and was therefore naked from the waist, upwards. In this state she came before Badan and Kálamánik, and laughed and danced and jumped about. They both became convinced that an evil spirit had taken possession of her. But there are two sorts of possession, in Bengal at least;—one by a witch and the other by a ghost : and the question was—Was Áduri under the influence of a witch or of a ghost? And it was important that the question should be speedily answered, as the two sorts of possession required two entirely different systems of treatment, and the doctor that expelled a witch was unable to cope with a ghost. At the suggestion of an old woman who happened then to be in the house, the matter was satisfactorily settled. She suggested that a piece of turmeric should be burnt and brought near Áduri's nostrils; if she quietly bore the fume and smell it

would then be concluded that she was under the influence of a witch; but if she could not endure it, then it was plain that she was possessed, or “eaten,” as the expression is in Bengali, by a ghost. Accordingly Gayarám and three other stout men caught hold of Áduri—for she seemed to have become superhumanly strong—and a piece of turmeric was burnt below her nostrils, with the smell of which Áduri was no better pleased

Than Asmodæus with the fishy fume
That drove him, though enamour'd, from the spouse
Of Tobit's son, and with a vengeance sent
From Media post to Egypt, there fast bound.

The moment the fume of the turmeric entered Áduri's nostrils, she gave an unearthly shriek, and tried to get off from the four strong men who were holding her. There was no doubt that it was a case of demoniacal possession, or rather ghost-possession. There lived at Devagrám, a village only a mile distant from Kánchanpur, an exorcist called *Bhutadiyá* (demon-expeller), or more commonly *ojhá*, whose fame was in all the neighbouring villages.

This person was speedily sent for. As it will take some time before the mighty physician whose jurisdiction extends to the world of invisible spirits arrives, let me improve the interval by giving to the reader a brief account of the different classes of Bengali ghosts, their habits and modes of appearance, or strictly speaking, of Bengali-Hindu ghosts, for of Muhammadan ghosts, usually called *Mámdos*, who are regarded as infinitely more mischievous than Hindu ghosts, I do not at present enquire.

Of Bengali ghosts, that is, the spirits of Bengali men and Bengali women, there is a great variety; but there are five classes which generally make their appearance, if not in cities and towns—for they seem altogether to have left the seats of enlightenment and civilisation—at least in the villages of Bengal. The first and most honourable class of ghosts are those which pass by the name of *Brahmadaityas*, or the spirits of departed Bráhmans. They generally take up their abode in the branches of the *gayú-asvatha* (*Ficus cordifolia*), the most sacred species of the *Ficus religiosa*, and also in the branches of the holy *sriphal* (*Ægle Marmelos*). Unlike other

ghosts, they do not eat all sorts of food, but only those which are considered religiously clean. They never appear, like other ghosts, to frighten men, such an object being beneath their dignity. They are for the most part inoffensive, never doing harm to benighted travellers, nor entering into the bodies of living men or women; but should their dignity be contemned, or their *sanctum sanctorum* be invaded or desecrated, their rage knows no bounds, and the neck of the offender is ruthlessly wrung and broken—a species of vengeance to which they are somewhat partial. Hence a Hindu will hardly ever climb up the *Ficus cordifolia* except in dire necessity; and if Bráhmans must often climb the *Ægle Marmelos* for obtaining the sacred trefoil so largely used in Bráhmanical worship, they do it only after offering prayers to the gods in general, and to the *Brahma-daitya* in particular who may have taken up his abode in the tree to be climbed.

Another class of ghosts, and they are by far the most numerous class, are simply called *bhútas*, that is, spirits. They are the spirits of departed Kshatriyas, Vaisyas, and Sudras. They are tall as

palmyra trees, generally thin, and very black. They usually live on trees of every description, excepting those, of course, on which Brāhmanical ghosts have taken up their abode. At night, especially at midnight—the hour and power of darkness—they go about in the villages and fields, frightening night-walkers and belated travellers. They prefer dirty places to clean, and have never been seen in the precincts of the temples of the gods. They are always stark naked. They are rather fond of women, whom they usually possess. They eat rice and all sorts of human food, but their favourite dish is fish. Their partiality for fish is so well known, that a large bribe is necessary to induce a Bengali peasant to go at night from one place to another with some quantity of fish in his hand. If he has the foolhardiness to go, especially to the outskirts of a village and to the fields, he is sure to be attacked by a ghost or ghosts anxious to devour the fish. If two ghosts attack him, the peasant has reason to be thankful, for in that case the two ghosts are sure to quarrel with each other, and the peasant to escape scot free. The best way to defend one's self from the attack of a

bhúta, is to repeat the names of the gods and goddesses, especially of Káli, Durgá, and Śiva, the last one being named *bhútanath*, or, the lord of ghosts. Another mode of preventing the attack of a ghost is to carry with you a stick or rod of iron, a metal of which spirits are, somehow or other, greatly afraid. Hence Hindu peasants, who require in some seasons of the year to go out to the fields at night, carry with them rods of iron. But neither the repetition of the names of the gods and goddesses nor an iron rod, will prevent a ghost from frightening a man from a distance; they are safeguards only against a ghost touching his person. All ghosts, owing to the peculiar conformation of their mouth, speak through the nose.

The *bhútas* are all male ghosts; but there are two classes of female ghosts, called *petnis* and *sánkhchihnis*. Of the *petnis* not much is known, except that they are terribly dirty—the stench of their bodies when near producing violent nausea in human beings; that they are very lascivious, trying to waylay benighted passengers for the gratification of their lusts; and that intercourse with them is sure to end in the destruc-

tion of both the body and of the soul. *Sāṅkhechihnis*, or *Saṅkhachurnis*, so called, in the opinion of some demonologists, because they put on clothes as white as *sankha* (conch-shell), and, in that of others, because they are fond of breaking conch-shells to pieces, are female ghosts, not so filthy as *petnis*, but equally dangerous. They usually stand at the dead of night at the foot of trees, and look like sheets of cloth as white as any fuller can make them.

Another class of ghosts are the *skandhahātas*, so called from the circumstance that their heads have been cut off from above their shoulders. These headless ghosts are probably the most terrible of the whole set, as they have never been known to spare any human being with whom they have come in contact. They generally dwell in low moist lands, outside a village, in bogs and fens, and go about in the dark, rolling on the ground, with their huge arms stretched out. Certain death awaits the belated peasant who falls within the folds of those gigantic arms. It is time, however, to put an end to this ghostly dissertation, as I perceive from the flutter amongst the inmates of Badan's house that the ghost doctor is at the door.

Before the arrival of the *ojhú* (ghost-doctor), Áduri had been carried *vi et armis* into Badan's sleeping-room, where she was jumping, dancing, stamping on the floor, making herself almost naked, now shrieking, now muttering unintelligible sounds. As soon as the *ojhú* entered the room, she sent forth an unearthly yell, and went to a corner. The exorcist, who was an able-bodied, middle-aged, rough-looking peasant, sat on a wooden plank on the floor, and began to blow with his mouth, and to utter some *mantras*, of which we give the following specimen :—

Dhulá sattam,
 Madhu pattam,
 Ládhulá karam sár;
 Ási hájár koti bandam,
 Teis hájár lár.
 Je pathe yáya amuk chhede de kes,
 Dain, yogini, pret, bhut,
 Báu, bátás, deva, dut,
 Káháro náiko nabaleo.
 Kár ájná?
 Kánader Kámákhyá hádijhi chandir ájná:
 Siggir lág, lág, lág.

Rising from his seat and approaching Áduri, the doctor said—"Who are you? Where do you live?"

Āduri, with a strong nasal accent, said—"What have you to do with me or my place of abode?"

Ojhá. "But you must tell me who you are, or you will feel the consequence."

Āduri. "Do your worst. I won't tell you who I am. I defy you to injure me."

Ojhá. "By Mahádeva! if you do not reply to my questions, I'll pound your bones in a mortar."

Āduri. "I won't reply to your questions."

On this the *ojhá* began to mutter the *mantras*, to blow with his mouth with all his might; and then belaboured poor Āduri with a bamboo twig which was in his hand. Āduri shrieked with agony, and then said, with the invariable nasal twang, that she was ready to answer all his questions.

Ojhá. "Who are you?"

Āduri. "I am a *bhúta*, a subject of Mahádeva."

Ojhá. "Where do you live?"

Āduri. "I formerly lived in the big mango-tree on the south-west corner of the tank *himásagara*; but some time ago I changed my residence, and have taken up my abode on the *tál* (palmyra) tree in the corner of Badan's house."

Ojhá. "Before you became *bhúta*, whose body did you animate in this world?"

Áduri. "That is a question which I am forbidden to answer. It is a secret of the spirit-world."

Ojhá. "But why have you come into the body of *chhofo bou*?"

Áduri. "Because she is vain of her beauty, and because she looks into the faces of men and smiles."

Ojhá. "You must leave her immediately."

Áduri. "You cannot force me to leave her."

Ojhá. "I *can't*, you say? Just wait."

So saying, he again began unmercifully to flog *Áduri*, who flew about like lightning from one end of the room to the other, her eyes staring wildly, her hair dishevelled, her clothes falling off her body, the *ojhá* closely following. Thump succeeded thump. Groans, shrieks, and unearthly nasal sounds filled the room, and everyone present was horror-struck. After a little *Áduri* took breath and said, or rather the ghost in her, that she would go away in the course of an hour. The *ojhá* insisted on instant departure; and flagellation commenced afresh. At last the *ojhá* took out of his bag the root of a certain

herb, wrapped it up in a *pán* leaf, and forced it into the mouth of Áduri, who chewed and swallowed it. She remained perfectly still for a few minutes. The *ojhá* again said: "Are you going immediately to leave *chhoto bou*?"

Áduri. "Yes."

Ojhá. "What sign will you give of your departure? How shall we know that you have left her?"

Áduri. "When I go away I shall carry with my teeth a curry-stone from this room to the end of the verandah."

Ojhá. "Very good."

The *ojhá* ordered the curry-stone of the family to be brought. It was about ten pounds in weight. Áduri caught it between her teeth and proceeded towards the door, the threshold of which she had scarcely stepped over when she fell down and fainted. Alanga, Sundari, and Málati—for the last had returned from her father-in-law's house—took her up insensible and in lock-jaw. A pair of *yánti* (nut-crackers made of iron) was pushed between her teeth, a little water was poured down her throat, and she revived. On becoming conscious she pulled

the veil down her face, and, looking at Sundari, said in a whisper, "Why am I here, sister? Why are so many people assembled here?" The ghost-doctor, at whose supernatural skill everyone wondered, was rewarded with one rupée and an old *dhuti*, and the crowd dispersed. That night, and many following nights, Gayáram would not sleep in the same room with his wife; and he got reconciled to her only after she had been purified by a religious ceremony performed by the family priest.

CHAPTER XVII.

GOVINDA AT SCHOOL.

And then the whining schoolboy, with his satchel,
And shining morning-face, creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school.

As You Like It.

WE must now return to our hero, and notice what progress he was making in reading and writing under that redoubtable pedagogue, Ráma Rúpa Sarkár, of Káncanpur. We saw him on the first day trace his letters with chalk on the ground; he remained at it for about six months, after which he exchanged the ground for palmyra-leaves, and chalk for the reed and ink. I say the *reed*, for the natives of Bengal, whether Rájá or ráiyat, do not use goose-quill, or swan-quill, or steel pens; their *kalama* (καλαμος), is made of the reed *khágdā* (*Saccharum*

spontaneum), only the learned professors of Sanskrit *śols* or colleges prefer to it the more common bamboo. As for the writing material, slates were unknown, till they were introduced into the country by the English, and are used only in schools organised on the English model. The leaves of the fan-palm are preferable to slates for beginners, for three reasons:—in the *first* place, the palm-leaf costs nothing, especially in the villages; *secondly*, it is more lasting, as it never breaks, and seldom tears; *thirdly*, it is lighter than a slate, and therefore can be more easily carried by children. Provided with a bundle of about twenty pieces of the palmyra-leaf under his left arm, the reed-pen resting on the upper hollow of his right ear, an earthen ink-pot in his left hand, and his right hand free, our hero used every morning and afternoon to go to the *páthśálá*, with other boys of the neighbourhood. He always returned home with his hands, face, and *dhuti* bespattered with ink; for whenever he wrote on the palm-leaf a wrong letter or an ill-formed one, he immediately used to brush it off with his hand, or his wrist. But Alanga and Sundari were rather

pleased with the sight than otherwise, for the abundance of ink on his body and clothes only showed how diligent their darling was in his studies.

In the old-fashioned, orthodox village *páthśáilás*, which are even now found all over the country, a boy only writes for some years, and does a little arithmetic, but seldom reads a book, the two subjects to which the greatest attention is paid being calligraphy and arithmetic. Early in the morning, when Govinda went to school, he spent some hours in writing the fifty letters of the Bengali alphabet, the compound letters which are so puzzling to foreigners, the numerals from one to a hundred, and the like. Before the forenoon school was dismissed he recited, in a chorus with other boys, those compound letters and the numerals. In the afternoon school he again wrote those very things, and in the evening, before being dismissed, recited in a sing-song manner, along with other boys, the whole of the Multiplication Table up to twenty times twenty, a table with which Bengali boys are more familiar than any other boys in the world. Next to the writing of the alphabet followed the writing of proper

names, especially of persons; the names of all the boys in the school, and those of the major part of the inhabitants of the village successively, appeared on the stage of the palm-leaf.

The study of arithmetic went on *pari passu* with caligraphy and orthography. First came a lot of arithmetical tables, which were all committed to memory; addition, both simple and compound, followed; next, subtraction, both simple and compound; then the boy at once passed on—for Bengali arithmetic has not the formal processes of multiplication and division—to what in European arithmetic is called Proportion, or the Rule of Three, but which in Bengali goes by the various names *serkashá*, *mankashá*, *káncánámáshá*, *sulkashá* (interest), *káthá-káli*, *bighákáli* (mensuration), according to the subjects to which the doctrine of Proportion is applied. The reader must not suppose that Govinda went through this course of arithmetic; his school course was cut short, as we shall see by-and-by, after he had mastered compound subtraction. As slates are not used in the village schools, and black-boards are as unknown in the *páthshálas* as Babbage's Calculating

Machine, and as palm-leaves are ill adapted for containing long rows of figures, all arithmetical operations are carried on, at least for some years in a boy's school life, on the mud floor of the school-house.

The lowest class of a Bengali *pūṭhśūlā*, of the primitive orthodox fashion, is the chalk or *floor class*; in this class Govinda remained about six months. The next class is the *palm-leaf class*, in which our hero studied for about three years. In the beginning of his fourth year he was promoted to the *plantain-leaf class*. Higher than the plantain-leaf class is the *paper class*, in which boys write on paper instead of on plantain-leaves; but Govinda's education did not come up so high. His education ended in the plantain-leaf class, of which some detailed account may not be unacceptable to the reader. Govinda now threw away his palm-leaves, and took to the plantain, of the leaves of which he had an abundant supply in his own house; but if the supply was now and then exhausted in consequence of the celebration of a feast, on which occasion plantain-leaves do, as we have seen, the duty of plates, he

had only to beg or borrow, or to steal them from neighbouring houses or gardens. Govinda now gave up the writing of merely personal names, and took to epistolary composition. This same study of epistolary composition, or correspondence, is a most important branch of Bengali education, and is pursued for years in the village *páthśálás*. Essay-writing is unknown in the primitive schools of Bengal, simply because it is not necessary to the purposes of life. Whatever is required in practical life is assiduously studied; and it must be acknowledged that the writing of letters is of essential importance to persons engaged in business. Nor is Bengali letter-writing an easy task. There are hundreds of set forms in which men are to be addressed according to their station in life, and to the relations in which they stand to the writer. The form in which the writer of a letter should address his father is different from that in which he should address his uncle, and the paternal uncle different from that in which he should address his maternal uncle; and the same is true of all the degrees of consanguinity and relationship; so that

the set forms of epistolary address are practically infinite. On this dark and unfathomable ocean of epistolary composition our hero was now launched.

By the way, our English schools and colleges in Bengal might take a hint in this respect from the village *páṭhśálá*. Our educated young men, our B.A.'s and M.A.'s in general, can hardly write a common letter in every-day English. They will write you a long Essay on the Feudal System in Europe, or a critique on "Macbeth," or an analysis of "The Flower and the Leaf;" but they will murder the Queen's English in writing a common business letter. There must be something vicious, something essentially wrong, in such a system of education. Of the two systems, the system of the village *páṭhśálá*, which aims at the practical and the useful, is infinitely more sensible. By all means have the ornamental part of education, but do not sacrifice utility to ornament. An M.A. and Fellow of the Calcutta University, when joining his appointment at a Mofussil Station, thus notified his arrival to his official superior: "Sir, I beg to inform you that I have arrived here yesterday." *O tempora! O mores!*

Can nothing be done to remedy this disgraceful state of things?

It may be easily believed that our hero was often subjected to that system of disciplinary correction of which Ráma Rúpa was so warm an advocate. A peasant's son, young, vigorous, and in rude health, Govinda hated the restraints of a school, and often played the truant. Instead of going to school he often repaired to the high embankment of some distant tank, or to some mango tope or tamarind grove, and there played with boys tending cattle. Ráma Rúpa, however, adopted vigorous measures for the seizing of truants. He had formed a sort of detective police, consisting of four able-bodied *sardárpodos*, or senior pupils, who were sent out whenever a truant had to be caught. Whenever Govinda was absent from school, these detectives went to his house, and asked his mother or grandmother where he was. If told that he had gone to school as usual, they sought for him in the outskirts of the village, and especially his favourite haunts, and invariably captured him. If he showed resistance, his legs would be caught hold of by two of the lads, and his

arms by the other two. Thus suspended between four stout bearers, Govinda, half dead with fright, was often brought to the *páṭh'sálá*, and there well thrashed by the pedagogue. This detective police was useful to the village schoolmaster in other ways. Whenever there was a feast in his house—and feasts are ever and anon occurring in Hindu houses, however poor—and he stood in need of plantain-leaves, to serve as plates for his guests, he had only to order his detectives to procure them; and they forthwith entered some garden and stole plantain-leaves for their teacher, who, asking no question for conscience sake, gladly received them with thanks.

Govinda was successively going through these varied processes of mental quickening, healthy discipline, and excellent moral training, when his school career was suddenly brought to a close by an accident, a description of which must be reserved for a future chapter.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SATÍ.

O sight of misery !
You cannot hear her cries—their sound
In that wild dissonance is drown'd ;
But in her face you see
The supplication and the agony ;
See in her swelling throat the desperate strength
That with vain effort struggles yet for life ;
Her arms contracted now in fruitless strife,
Now wildly at full length
Towards the crowd in vain for pity spread ;
They force her on, they bind her to the dead.

Curse of Kehama.

It was somewhere about this time, when Govinda was between seven and eight years of age, that he witnessed one of those horrible scenes which, in former times, were daily enacted on the plains, and especially on the banks of the sacred Bhágirathi, but which, thanks to

the enlightened humanity of the British Government, have now been altogether suppressed. Every one at Káncanpur had taken his midday meal—for the hour was about three o'clock in the afternoon—and Govinda was on his way to the *páṭhsálá*, with his bundle of palm-leaves and mud ink-pot, when his ears were regaled with a peculiar beat of the drum which he had never heard before. As the sound proceeded from near the house of his father's family priest, Rámdhan Misra, Govinda, instead of going to school, turned towards that lane, especially as he saw numbers of men, women, and children were running in that direction. Rámdhan Misra's father had died that morning, and the peculiar beat of the drum, to which we have alluded, announced to the inhabitants of the village that his wife, or rather widow, had resolved to burn herself on the same funeral pile with her husband. Govinda entered the house with difficulty, as it was filled with a large crowd. In the middle of the court-yard of the house he saw Rámdhan's mother sitting surrounded by a great many women. Far from weeping on account of the death of her husband, she was every now and then

laughing, and seemed to be the gayest of the gay. She looked clean and bathed; the nails of her fingers and toes had been pared off by a female barber, and the sides of her feet, as well as the tips of her toes, had been painted red with the *alakta*; she was dressed in a suit of new clothes, or rather in a new *súti*; she was dazzling in ornaments in all parts of her body; her forehead was painted red with vermilion; her lips were red with the paint of catechu and lime in the *pán* which she was chewing; and she waved in her hand a small twig of the mango tree with leaves; altogether, she looked not as a widow mourning for her deceased partner, but “prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.” The dead body of her husband had been already carried to the place of cremation, and she was about to follow thither. As she walked through the streets—for the burning place was in the outskirts of the village—she said to the hundreds of men and women who had flocked to see her, that that was the day of her marriage, the happiest day of her life; and she raised the well-known marriage shout, *ulu! ulu! ulu!* There was not a single person in the village,

male or female, who did not look upon her with the utmost reverence. They called her *satī*, or the Chaste One, by way of eminence, as her conjugal fidelity was such that she was following her husband into the invisible world. They compared her to Sāvitrī—the ideal of a Hindu wife, and praised her for her extraordinary piety, her conjugal faithfulness, and her heroic fortitude. As the procession went on, exclamations of *ulu ! ulu ! ulu ! Hari bol ! Hari bol ! Hari bol !* rent the air ; and the deafening *tom-toms* kept time with those sounds. At last the procession reached the side of the tank, where the pile had been prepared, on which the body of the deceased had been already laid. The pile was between seven and eight feet long, about four broad, and three high. There was a goodly array of faggots and flax ; a pot filled with clarified butter was also there.

The *satī* now took off the ornaments from her body, and distributed them amongst her friends and relations, who were standing around her ; and she threw among the crowd handfuls of fried paddy (*khadi*), and shells (*kaḍi*), which she had with her. Great was the scramble among the crowd for the fried

paddy and the shells, for it was believed that they had the singular property of miraculously healing all sorts of diseases. Mothers not unfrequently tied one or two of these shells round the necks of their children as a charm against all disease. Govinda was fortunate enough to get one of these shells, which he carefully secured in a corner of his *dhuti*. She next went through the ceremony of *pradakshin*, that is, she went seven times round the pile on which the body of her deceased husband had been laid, scattering about her all the time fried paddy and shells. Circumambulation over, she went up to the pile with unfaltering steps, and laid herself down beside the body of her deceased husband. The living and the dead were now tied together by strong ropes, and faggots were heaped upon them. A death-like stillness followed. Rámdhan, the son of the living and the dead, now approached the pile with a lighted faggot in his hand, to discharge the last offices of filial affection prescribed in the holy books. With averted eyes he applied the faggot to the mouth of his deceased father, and to the pile. The pile blazed up in a moment, and the women and other relations

of the deceased, set up a loud scream. As the flame reached the *satí's* body, she shrieked; but the drums were beat in full chorus, to drown the cries of the unhappy woman. More faggots were applied, and quantities of *ghi*, or clarified butter, were poured upon them to aid the combustion.

But lo! the *satí* has disengaged herself from the ropes by which she had been tied. She sits up. She stretches out her hands imploringly. She screams. She attempts to escape. The intoxication of superstition had hitherto kept her up, but she now gives way to nature. But in vain. The drums are now beat at their loudest; deafening shouts of *Harí bol ! Harí bol !* pierce the skies; and by means of two bamboos, which were kept in readiness, the *satí* is prevented from getting down. It is all over with her. She has fallen a victim to grim superstition. More faggots and *ghi* were had in requisition till the bodies were quite consumed. What Govinda felt on witnessing this shocking scene I know not, for he has left no record of his thoughts; but it is not too much to assert that there was not a single man or woman in all Káchanpur who felt

that there was anything wrong in that dreadful act of self-murder; on the contrary, all regarded it as an act of the highest piety, and looked upon the unfortunate victim of Bráhmancial superstition as an especial favourite of Heaven.

This was the last time when the *satí* rite was performed at Kánchanpur, for in a few months after this event, Lord William Bentinck, one of the most beneficent of rulers that ever wielded the destinies of an empire, had the moral courage to enact, on 4th December, 1829, that law which for ever put a stop to that murderous practice.

CHAPTER XIX.

EVENINGS AT HOME.

I could a tale unfold, whose lightest word
Would harrow up thy soul ; freeze thy young blood ;
Make thy two eyes, like stars, start from their spheres ;
Thy knotted and combined locks to part,
And each particular hair to stand on end,
Like quills upon the fretful porcupine.

Hamlet.

I FORGET whether I told the English reader—for the Bengali reader does not require to be told it—that in the village of Káncanpur there was no such thing as a tavern. There was, indeed, a grog shop in the outskirts of the village, where spirits distilled from rice were sold, but it was resorted to only by the lowest people, like *húdis* and *doms*, people much lower in social status than the agricultural class to which Badan belonged. Besides, in the grog shop no company could be had ; people went there merely

for drink, and after getting what they wanted, they returned to their homes. Badan and any member of his family would no more think of drinking spirits or wine than of committing murder—the former habit being reckoned almost as heinous a crime as the latter. Badan, Kálamánik, and Gayáram, therefore, generally spent their evenings at home; only now and then they visited their friends. In the summer months, beginning in February and ending about the middle of June, after returning from their day's work in the field, and after they had washed their feet and hands, they spread a mat in the court-yard, sat upon it cross-legged, smoked, and talked on the events of the day. Alanga often sat near them, not on the mat, but on the ground at a little distance, and joined in the conversation. The subjects of conversation were often the state of the weather; bullocks; the progress made in ploughing, or harrowing, or sowing, or irrigating; the zamindár's rent; and the *mahújan's* (money-lender's) interest. In all these matters old Alanga took as keen an interest as Badan himself. Sometimes a neighbour dropped in, to whom was administered the never-failing hospitality of the hookah.

Govinda was invariably present at these evening parties. At sun-down, he returned from the *páthśálá*; put away in a corner of the verandah of the big hut his bundle of palmyra-leaves, his reed-pen, and earthen pot of ink; washed his hands, feet, and mouth, at the tank; ate in the kitchen his *dál* and *bhát*, dealt to him either by his mother or his grandmother—for, as a little boy, he could not wait so late as eight or nine o'clock, when the men and the women (excepting Alanga, who, as a widow, had only one meal), usually had their supper: and sat on the mat in the yard beside his father and uncles. Sitting there he was made to recite the Multiplication Table, and other lessons which he had learnt at school. Badan, though not initiated into the mysteries of reading and writing, often put arithmetical questions to his son and heir. The following are specimens of the questions he put:

“If for one pice you get ten plantains, how many plantains would you get for four pice?”

“If for one pice you get ten plantains, what would be the price of fifty plantains?”

The first time Badan proposed such questions, Govinda in his simplicity, asked,

“Which sort of plantains, *Bábá*? (*Bábá* being invariably used in Bengali for papa.) Is it the *martamána*, or the *kíntúli* kind?”

Badan, giving a smile significant of superior wisdom, sagely replied,

“It does not matter, Govin, what sort of plantain it is, the calculation is all the same.”

Over a question, Govinda would sometimes spend a quarter of an hour, and Badan, fearing that the little mathematician had fallen asleep, would ask,

“Are you sleeping, Govin?” when Govinda would immediately answer,

“No, *Bábá*, I am not sleeping; I am calculating it in my mind.”

But Badan had the good sense not to torture him with a large number of questions; after one or two questions, he allowed him to do whatever he chose. And what Govinda chose every night to do, was to go to a neighbouring hut, which was occupied by an old woman famous for story-telling.

Sambhu's mother—so the old woman was called

—was about fifty years of age, a widow, who supported herself by spinning thread and selling it to weavers. She had a son of the name of Sambhu, who, being about ten years old, made himself useful and earned a little money by tending the cows of a neighbour. Sambhu's mother was acknowledged to be the best story-teller in her part of the village, and was therefore looked upon with admiring awe by all the children. As soon as the lamps were lit, children dropped in into her hut, sometimes singly, sometimes in groups of two or three, to listen to the marvellous upakathás (stories) of Sambhu's mother. It was this party of children that Govinda joined every night after extricating himself from the arithmetical cross-examination of his father and uncles. The old woman sat in her hut before a dim lamp, the oil of which was supplied to her every evening by one or other of her infantile audience. She was not, however, idle while reciting stories, she incessantly turned the *charká* which went round merrily to the tune of *ghnan, ghan, ghan*. When describing a pathetic or an awful scene she would drop the handle of the wheel from her right hand, and the carded cotton

from her left, and make gestures suitable to the narrative.

Sambhu's mother's stories were usually on three subjects—kings and queens, ghosts, and the travels of four friends. Every king of Sambhu's mother had two queens, one of whom, called *Suo*, was always good; and the other, called *Duo*, was always bad; and the story always ended in the punishment of the bad queen and the prosperity of the good one. "Four Friends in Travel" was the stock-theme of another class of stories; and though their adventures were different in different stories, the four friends were always the same, viz., *rāj-putra* (king's son), *pátrér-putra* (minister's son), *koṭóler-putra* (son of the prefect of the police), and *sadágarrer-putra* (merchant's son). But the most popular of all her stories were those about ghosts, in reciting which she exerted her utmost powers of description. When describing the approach of a ghost, she would lower her voice into a whisper, and when the ghost spoke she always spoke through the nose. On such occasions the young listeners always got frightened; they drew towards each other and towards Sambhu's mother;

they felt a shiver through the system, and their hair stood on end. When the last story of the night was a ghost-story, the children were afraid to go to their homes singly; they formed themselves into a group, from which each one dropped off as he came to the door of his house, the boldest of the company being the last to reach home. Though Govinda was the story-teller's next-door neighbour, he never could go home alone after hearing a ghost-story; his comrades always accompanied him not only to the door, but to the inside of his house. These ghost-stories, volumes of which are heard by every Bengali boy, produce two effects on his mind—they strengthen his idea of the supernatural, and make him timid and cowardly.

CHAPTER XX.

THE HINDU WIDOW.

Sche weepeth, weyleth, cryeth piteously ;
To slen hirself sche wayteth pryvyly.

The Knyghte's Tale.

It was the month of August. The elephants of the quarters were dipping their gigantic trunks in the universal ocean, and scattering the limpid element in the face of the heavens. The rain was descending in torrents, each drop of which was so thick and heavy, that the people of Kánchanpur compared it to the pestle of a pedal; and the oldest inhabitant of the village declared that he had never seen since his birth such copious showers. The embankments of the mighty Ajaya broke, the banks of the Máya overflowed, the country for miles was under water, and Kánchanpur looked like an island in the ocean. All husbandry was of course put an end to; the

cows were pent up in their folds; and the peasants either smoked in idleness or spun packthread in their rude reels, except those adventurous spirits who went out with hand-nets to catch fish in the surrounding waters. When, after a few days, the waters had subsided, and the balks of the paddy fields were just visible, Badan, Kálamánik, and Gayáram went to see those fields on which grew the *Áus* paddy, which before the late heavy rains was almost ready for the sickle. Each of the three brothers had the peasant's *pínchau* or bamboo stick in his hand, without which they never went to the fields. As Gayáram was walking upon a balk between two paddy fields, a *kentīya* serpent, a species of cobra di capella, jet black in complexion, about three cubits in length, reared its hooded head above the waters, stood almost bolt upright for a second, and darted like lightning towards him. It was not unlike those snakes in the forests of Calabria, of which Virgil speaks in his "Georgics," a passage from which we give in Dryden's translation:—

In fair Calabria's woods a snake is bred,
With curling crest and an advancing head:

Waving he rolls, and makes a winding track ;
His belly spotted, burnished is his back.
While springs are broken, while the southern air
And dropping heavens the moistened earth repair,
He lives on standing lakes and trembling bogs,
And fills his maw with fish, or with loquacious frogs.

Such was the snake which made a dash against Gayáram. There was no time to escape. In the twinkling of an eye the serpent darted its fangs near his ankle-joint, turned again, and gave a second bite. Kálamánik, who was at a short distance, rushed forward, and with one blow of his heavy bamboo, put an end to the malignant career of the venomous reptile. But it was too late. The poison of the *kentīya* is quicker in its effects than that of almost any other species of serpent. Gayáram dropped down. Badan, who had now come up to the spot, tied his *gámchhá* (bathing towel) above the part bitten, and with the assistance of Kálamánik carried him home. The women set up a loud lamentation. The neighbours, and the inhabitants of the village in general, came in crowds, and were struck with horror. Many were the prayers silently offered to the goddess

Manasá Devi, the goddess of snakes, for Gayáram's recovery. Some proposed one drug, some another; at last it was decided that the famous *múl* (serpent-catcher) of Chandraháti, a village two miles distant, who was a well-known curer of serpent-bite, should be sent for. The only thing that Badan did in the meantime, was to bind the leg tightly above the ankle, and to wash the wound with milk. But the poison was evidently working into the system. Gayáram now shrieked in agony, and now was falling into a stupor, and they tried their best to keep him awake. As Gayáram was very young, very gentle in his disposition, and never did any injury to any one, the sympathy of the whole village was excited on his behalf. Many old women proposed many nostrums, some of which were tried, but without effect.

The *múl* of Chandraháti at last arrived, and immediately began operations. He rubbed down the body of Gayáram, as if trying to bring down the poison which had coursed up; blew over it with his mouth, and muttered many *mantras*, one of which was as follows :—

Háya more ki holo !
Ghaṭáite bish molo !
Nái bish, bishárir ájná.

But the *ojhú* did not resort to mere charms and incantations. He made the patient swallow several roots of plants reduced to powder, and a substance which looked very like *nousálar* (ammonia), though he refused to mention its name. The whole night the *múl* tried his utmost, now calling upon the gods, chiefly Mahádeva; now rubbing down the body; now blowing with his mouth; now administering drugs. But in vain. Before dawn, Gayarám was a lifeless corpse.

This dreadful event filled with unutterable sorrow the members of the humble family whose fortunes form the subject of this book. Badan felt as if his right hand had been cut off, for though Gayarám was the youngest of the three, he had wisdom beyond his years, and often gave salutary advice in times of difficulty. Kálamánik, though less demonstrative than Badan, and somewhat stern and unengaging in his outward demeanour, had within his rough exterior the sterling gold of a truly generous and

sympathetic nature ; and his inward agony of mind at the premature and terribly sudden loss of an affectionate brother, which was all the more intense that it found no outlet, visibly told on his health. Alanga's grief was infinite. As the deceased was her youngest son, she had perhaps greater affection for him than for the other two. Day and night she wept over her son prematurely cut off. She began and ended the day with lamentations, her mournful dirge being often prolonged to the silent and solemn hour of midnight. For a long time she did not touch the *charká*, but spent the afternoon in loud lamentations, which might have been heard from distant huts, and in which she dwelt on every feature of the person and every trait of the character of her favourite son. It was Rachel weeping for her child, and refusing to be comforted because he was not. The recollection of the sort of death which Gayárám had met with added to the poignancy of Alanga's grief. It was an unnatural death. Death by serpent-bite, by lightning, by fire, by a fall, and other sorts of accidental and sudden end, are regarded as visitations from the gods for sin. And Alanga could not understand why *they*,

of all people in the village, should be visited with such a dreadful calamity. She said to herself: "Don't we fear and worship the gods? Don't we respect Bráhmans? Don't we give alms according to our means? Don't we practise the usual religious ceremonies? Why then should the gods be angry with us? What sin have we committed that we should be visited with so heavy a calamity? O Vidhátá! was this in thy mind?"

Áduri's sorrow was, however, the gloomiest, though perhaps less disinterested than Alanga's. It was the blackness of dark despair. Her married life was now at an end. Though young, she must remain a widow all her life. Association with a husband is regarded as the *summum bonum* of womanly existence. Is life worth anything now that happiness has become impossible? What made her saddest was the horrible prospect of perpetual widowhood. Her sun had gone down while it was noon. Hope, that comes to all, never visited her. The rest of her life—if life it could be called—was to be one continued midnight, without the remotest prospect of a dawn. It is impossible not to sympathise with a Hindu

widow. It is not that she is persecuted and tormented by her relations and friends—that is a fiction of foreign writers, of people unacquainted with Hindu life in its actual manifestations—but the peculiar wretchedness of her condition lies in this, that the fountain of her heart, with its affections and desires, is for ever dried up. She becomes a soulless thing, and her life a blank. Āduri did not, like Alanga, fill the house and the neighbourhood with her cries, nor did she expatiate in her lamentations on every good quality of her amiable husband. Such a thing would have been deemed indecent in a widow. Her grief was a silent grief. She sobbed day and night. She broke her ornaments, whether of conch-shell, or sealing-wax, or silver; she broke the iron ring on her wrist, the symbol of wifehood; she no longer braided her hair; she gave up daubing the top of her forehead with vermilion, which distinguishes a Hindu wife from a Hindu widow; she gave up putting on *sūtis* with coloured borders. Her share of the pleasures of life had been exhausted; her part on the theatre of life had been played out: henceforth,

though in the world, she was not to be of the world.

English people have, somehow or other, got the idea that a Hindu widow receives harsh and cruel treatment from the relations of her husband. This is not true. There are no doubt exceptional cases, but, as a general rule, Hindu widows are not only not ill treated, but they meet with a vast deal of sympathy. Old widows in a Bengali Hindu family are often the guides and counsellors of those who style themselves the lords of creation. We had the happiness of being acquainted with a venerable old Hindu widow who was not only the mistress of her own house, consisting of a considerable number of middle-aged men and women, but she was often the referee of important disputes in the village of which she was an inhabitant, and her decisions were received with the highest respect. Nor is this an exceptional case. Old widows, provided they have intelligence and good character, assert, on account of their experience in life, their superiority over men younger than they. As to the privations of widows, a little too much is made of them. Besides the one supreme privation

of having the fountain of their affections scaled up, the others, of which foreign writers make so much, are not worth speaking about. The most considerable of these minor privations is that only one meal is permitted them in twenty-four hours. But this restraint will cease to be regarded as a privation when it is considered that a widow's meal is usually larger in quantity and heavier in weight than that of a married woman; that the meal is taken in the afternoon not many hours before sleep; that most widows are sleek and stout; and that many of the strong and able-bodied peasants of the North Western Provinces, and the Hindu Sepoys in the Bengal army, take only one meal in twenty-four hours. Let not the reader suppose that we are extenuating the misery of Āduri. Her case was truly pitiable. Though not anticipating unkind treatment from the rest of the family, she felt that she was socially dead; at any rate, that she was ALONE in the world.

This calamitous event in Badan's little household altogether changed the colour and complexion of our hero's destiny. It is idle to conjecture what he might have become if his education had been

carried on; he might perhaps have become a *mohurir* (clerk), a *gomastá* (agent), or a *naib* (manager) to a zamindár. But the untimely death of Gayarám put an end to all those hopes. Govinda could not be conveniently allowed to continue his studies. Gayarám had charge of the cows and of the bullocks. Now that he is gone to the other world, who is to attend on them? Badan and Kálamánik were required for cultivation; and the women—excepting little girls—of Badan's class of peasants do not usually tend cows in the field. The resolution was at once taken that Govinda should no longer go to the *páthśálá*. Thus closed our hero's career at school, where he had learned to add, to subtract, and to sign his name. But there is another education quite different from that which is given in schools; how Govinda profited by it will be seen in subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER XXI.

ODDS AND ENDS.

There is a tear for all that die,
A mourner o'er the humblest grave.

Byron.

AFTER the terribly sudden death of Gayarám, the family in whose fortunes we are interested became unclean for a month; for what is called mourning amongst Europeans, is called *ásoucha* (uncleanness) amongst Hindus, not unlike the custom of the Jews of old. Upon people whose life is a continual scene of privation, *ásoucha* does not press heavily: still it entailed some hardship on the little family. Fish, which is an essential accompaniment of Bengali diet, being eaten along with rice both at mid-day and at night, was not touched by any member of the family during the thirty days of uncleanness. To Alanga

alone this was no privation, as she had ceased to be piscivorous since the commencement of her widowhood. Free social intercourse with friends was not cultivated, as a person who is unclean cannot touch another without defiling him. The hair on Badan's chin and forehead—parts which are always shaven, unless a Hindu, like the Jewish Nazarite, dedicates it to some god—was suffered to grow; and mustard oil, with which a Bengali, whether Rájá or ráiyat, anoints his body before bathing, and which makes his face to shine, was discontinued. The greatest austerities are naturally practised by the nearest relations of a deceased person—by his eldest son and his widow; but as Gayáram had no children, they were practised by Áduri alone. She put on the same piece of *súṭi*—without a coloured border—day and night for a whole month; and after bathing every day, she kept on her person the *súṭi* dripping wet, till it dried of itself. She did not join the family meal, and did not eat what had been cooked by others; she cooked for herself: nor was she allowed to eat what the others ate—she had to be satisfied with one meal a day of simple *átap*, rice boiled with

a little milk or clarified butter. In this manner, Āduri and the rest spent the whole of the unclean month. On the thirtieth day took place the purification. The male members of the family were shaved by the family barber, and the female barber pared the nails of the fingers and toes of the women. They then bathed in a tank, put on new clothes, performed certain religious ceremonies called *śrāddha*, with the assistance of the family priest—and thus became clean, and restored to the society and communion of their fellow-men.

We have more than once, in the course of this narrative, spoken of Badan's family *guru*, or spiritual director, family priest, and family barber of both sexes; and the English reader may ask how could a poor man like Badan, a mere cultivator of the soil, afford to keep such expensive articles as a father-confessor, a priest, and a barber. But whether they are expensive or not, those three gentlemen are essentially necessary to every Hindu family. There cannot be a Hindu family which has not its *guru*, its *purohita*, its *nāpita*; and the reason is that there cannot be a Hindu family without its religion, re-

ligion being interwoven with social manners and customs.

Nor are these officers expensive. Gangá Nápita, the barber, once a fortnight shaved the forehead and chin of Badan, Kálamánik, and afterwards of our hero ; and his worthy partner in life, whose name we never heard, as she was always called *Nápitai*, or more familiarly *Nápteni*, once a month pared the nails of the women. And what did the couple receive for these fortnightly and monthly services ? Why, not more than half a *man* (maund) of paddy about the time of harvest, the price of which in the days of which we are speaking could not have been more than four annas, or sixpence, besides some occasional presents at a marriage, on purification after the death of a member of the family, at the birth of a child, and the like. The *purohita* (priest) of the family, Rámdhan Misra, the same whose mother became *satí*, who officiated at births, marriages, deaths, and all religious celebrations, hardly received anything except the offerings (consisting of rice, plantains, and the like) made to the gods on those occasions, and occasional presents of the products of the earth in their seasons, like

brinjal, potatoes, pulse, sugar-cane. Though most Āguris are of the *Sáikta* sect, Badan was a Vaishnava, and had therefore a *gosvámi* for his *guru*, or spiritual guide, whose name was Vrindávana Gosvámi, of the village of Áográma, many miles distant from Kánchanpur. He visited the family once a year in the course of his ecclesiastical visitation, the object of which was not so much the imparting of ghostly instruction as the fleecing his flock as much as he possibly could. Indeed, he did not give instruction at all. The only thing he ever did to any disciple during that disciple's lifetime was to whisper once into his ear one or two unmeaning sounds like *kling krishna*, or *ring dhung*, or *dhung phat*, which unmeaning sounds are called *vija-mantras*, or *seed-prayers*, and which the disciple had to repeat, either mentally or in a whisper, every day of his life at least one hundred-and-eight times. When the *gosvámi* inflicted Badan with his annual visit, he had to give him an eight-anna piece (a shilling), except on occasions of initiation into the *seed-prayers*, when the spiritual guide expected perquisites. The English reader may think that the

guru is the bishop, and the *purohita* is his curate; such is, however, not the case. The two persons are quite independent of, and may be unknown to, each other, their functions being entirely different. The *guru* is something like a Father Confessor, and the *purohita* like a Chaplain. The intelligent reader will thus perceive that a Bengali ráiyat like Badan is not too poor to entertain the services of a Father Confessor, a domestic chaplain, and a family surgeon—for Gangá Nápita wielded both the razor and the lancet—since the total annual cost for keeping those three dignitaries did not come up to more than six shillings.

It may be asked again by the simple English reader, if the remuneration of the spiritual guide, the priest and the barber, be so little, how do they maintain themselves and their families? In the first place, these three personages render services to a great many people, and every little makes a muckle. The barber of Badan was the barber of hundreds of other people in the village, since every Hindu requires the services of the craft, and no Hindu shaves himself; Badan's priest was the priest of a great many

other families, some of whom were rich, and gave him a great deal; while Badan's spiritual guide had disciples, not only at Káncanpur, but in hundreds of other villages scattered all over the country, from all of whom he received his yearly stipend. In the second place, the spiritual priest and barber do not depend for their livelihood on the income of their trade or profession: each has some acres of land, which he cultivates by employing labourers.

In the villages of Bengal, nearly all classes of people, excepting the peasantry, get their clothes washed by members of the *dhobá* caste, who have been washermen from generation to generation. In Badan's house the women did the washing, which took place once a month. On such occasions, the clothes, put in *húndis* containing water, cow's urine, and ashes—especially the ashes of burnt plantain trees, which have a powerful alkaline property—were subjected to the process of boiling, and then taken out to the tank near the house and beaten upon a plank or a big stone, and subsequently washed in water and put in the sun. Exceptionally fine clothes, like those worn on high days and holidays, were

given to the professional washerman. I should, however, remark that every member of Badan's family washed in water his or her *dhuti* or *sáfi* every day at the time of bathing, as it is reckoned unclean, from a ceremonial point of view, to put on during the day the same piece of cloth in which a person has slept at night. Hence a Hindu, though poor, must have two pieces of cloth—one to bathe in (bathing naked being unknown in the country), and another to put on while the first one is drying in the sun; and if a peasant be the poorest of the poor he has his *gáunchhó*, or bathing-towel, which he wraps round his waist whilst his *dhuti* is drying. Considering that Bengali Hindu peasants bathe every day throughout the year, and every day wash their clothes in water, we have no hesitation in saying that they are about the cleanest peasantry in the world.

CHAPTER XXII.

PASTORAL SCENES.

A various group the herds and flocks compose :
Rural confusion ! On the grassy bank
Some ruminating lie ; while others stand
Half in the flood, and, often bending, sip
The circling surface. In the middle droops
The strong laborious ox, of honest front,
Which, incomposed, he shakes ; and from his sides
The troublous insects lashes with his tail,
Returning still.

Thomson's Seasons.

Our hero has bidden adieu to the school of Ráma Rúpa, and enrolled himself a student in the great school of Dame Nature. He has done with primers, with palmyra and plantain-leaves—at least so far as writing on them is concerned ; while the music of the multiplication table he has exchanged for the harmony of warblers of the grove. We have seen what Govinda

did every day when he attended the *páthśálá*; let us now see what he did every day after he had been installed neat-herd of the family.

Govinda rose early every morning before crow-cawing, went to the straw-loft, took down some bundles of paddy straw, and, with the assistance of his uncle Kálamánik, began chopping them with a large sickle called *bontí*. With the chopped straw, mixed with water and some pieces of mustard oil-cakes, he filled those *nánds* or earthen tubs, which were half sunk in the ground on the yard near the stack of straw. Having made ready their food, he brought out of the cow-house all the cows and bullocks, and tied them to their respective tubs. While the cows were munching their breakfast, he went into the cow-house, made a heap of the dung in a corner of the yard, and threw the refuse into the dunghill behind the kitchen. He next swept the cow-house and made it as clean as he could, strewing the wet places with ashes. After some time the cows were milked; but as Govinda was not yet equal to the operation, he contented himself for some time with merely catching hold of the calves

by their ears, while Kálamánik, sitting on his toes in a kneeling posture, and resting the milk-can between his knee-joints, went on milking, at a great rate, to the delightful tune of *chan-cho, chan-cho, chan-cho*. The next thing he did was that he went out, with a large quantity of the milk and a half *seer* measure, to a Bráhmaṇ family in the neighbourhood who had contracted with Badan for a daily supply. On returning home he made preparations for going out to the fields with the cows. These preparations consisted in putting a quantity of tobacco in an earthen cup—for our hero, though only twelve years old, had already taken to smoking—in pouring a little quantity of mustard oil into a *chongí* (bamboo phial) to anoint his body with before bathing, and in tying some fried rice in his *gámchhá*. The preparations over, he loosened the cows, and took them out to graze beside a large tank, where was an *avatha* tree, in the shade of which were sitting four lads who had evidently come on the same errand as Govinda. On seeing him one of the lads said, “Hullo, Gove, what is the matter? We thought you were not coming to-day.”

Govinda. “I am a little late to-day. I was

delayed in the house of the Bhaṭṭacháryas, where I stopped a long time before they took milk. The *ginni* (mistress) had gone to bathe, and there was nobody in the house to take milk."

First Lad. "How much milk does Mangli give now? I thought she was about to cease giving milk."

Govinda. "She will do so soon; but in the meantime she gives one *seer* of milk both morning and evening."

Second Lad. "She is a Lakshmi cow. Do you know, Gove, that your father bought Mangli from my father?"

Govinda. "Yes? It is curious I never heard of that. How much did my father pay for her?"

Second Lad. "He paid only ten *ṭákás*."

I may state here that the word rupeyá, or as it is commonly written rupée or rupi, is unknown to the peasantry of Bengal, at least to Bengali Hindu peasants; the word they invariably use is *ṭáká*.

Govinda. "That is very cheap; for she is a good cow."

Second Lad. "Of course, it is very cheap. My

father gave her away almost for nothing, as he was in arrears with the zamindár."

Third Lad. "Look! look! there is a *hanumán* (baboon) coming towards us with something like a gunny-bag in its hands. What can it be?"

Govinda. "It is a gunny-bag of *baḍi*. The rascal has stolen it from the roof of some house."

Third Lad. "Very likely. Look! the *hanumán* has gone up the tree. I hope the fellow will not pelt our heads."

Govinda. "If he did you should be thankful, as *Hanumán* was Ráma's beloved servant and devoted disciple. Your head would be sanctified."

Third Lad. "Sábásh! Sábásh! (Well done!) By going to *páṭhśála* two or three years, Gove has become a Pandit. May you live for ever, Gove!"

Govinda. "What have I done to call forth such sarcasm? I don't pretend to be wiser than you all."

Fourth Lad. "Look! another *hanumán* is coming with a baby monkey suspended on her chest."

Second Lad. "Gove! see your Mangli is going into Padma Pál's sugar-cane field. If he sees it he will drive the ghost out of you by abusing you."

Govinda. (Bawling aloud and directing his voice towards the cow *Mangli* about to enter the sugar-cane plantation.) “Heh ! heh ! heh ! *Mangli* ! Don’t go there, you *syá-lá* (wife’s brother, used as a term of abuse) of a cow.”

Second Lail. “*Mangli* does not care for your words ; she is now fairly in.”

Govinda now ran towards the sugar-cane plantation, and brought back the cow, not without getting some abuse from *Padma Pál*, the owner of the plantation, who happened to be there at the time.

After this the five boys began in fun to throw clods of earth at the baboons on the tree. One of these baboons was what is called a *godá*, that is to say, a baboon of unusually large size, and fierce in proportion. The *godá*, being provoked to wrath, started up, reared its long tail in the form of a circle, leapt from branch to branch, and filled the air with sounds of *Oop, oop, oop* ; it again sat on a branch, showed its teeth at the lads in a fierce manner, and gave out from its deep chest the harsh cry, *khakor, khakor, khakor* : at last being completely foiled by the missiles of the juvenile assailants, it came down

from the tree and galloped away to a distant one, the female baboon following with her cub.

After the baboons had gone away, Govinda and his associates ate the parched rice which each one had brought for himself, and then sauntered among the thickets and climbed up trees for fruits. They ate a lot of wild fruit called *bainchi*—the shrub on which it grows abounding in the place, and an acid fruit called *Karanchú*; but the fruit which they liked best, and which they found growing on a large tree in the vicinity, was the *phalsá* (*Grewia asiatica*). They all climbed up this tree, and, sitting on its branches like so many baboons, ate its little pleasant fruit. They then went to look after their cows and to bring them together, as they had dispersed in different directions. This done, they anointed their bodies with mustard oil, which each one had brought for himself in a bamboo phial. Bathing then followed. The tank was full of aquatic plants of a hundred species, of which the *raktakambal* (*Nelumbium speciosum*) or red lotos, was the most magnificent-looking. Our cow-herd boys tore up large quantities of various sorts of water-lilies, the pods

of some of which and the stalks of others are edible. After this feast of fruits was over, and after they had again put on their *dhutis*, which had been extended on the grass for sunning, Govinda said—"Well friends, I am going home to eat *bhát*; please take care of my cows during my absence; I shall be late in coming, as I shall have to go to the eastern meadow with *bhát* for my father and uncle, but Sambhu will come before me, and relieve you all three." So Govinda and Sambhu, his neighbour, the son of the story-telling woman of whom we have spoken, went away. Govinda ate his *bhát* at home, took his father and uncle's dinner to the fields on the east side of the village, and returned to his place at the foot of the *asvatha* tree, where he found Sambhu sitting alone, as the other three had gone home for their dinner. After some time those three returned, and the party spent the afternoon in very much the same manner as the forenoon—now going after their cows to prevent them from injuring the crops, now climbing up trees and playing pranks on their branches, now singing songs about cows and women, and now playing at *háḍḍuḍu*. But the great object of their solicitude

in the afternoon was the gathering of a basketful of cow-dung, on the failure of which they would be sharply rebuked by their parents, guardians or masters.

The sun has now set, though a few of his departing rays are still visible on the leafy top of distant palmyras. It is twilight—in Bengali very appropriately called *godhūli*, or *cow's dust*—the cows must be taken home. Each neat-herd boy, with a basket of cow-dung on his head, and a bamboo stick in his right hand, is behind his herd of cows, ever and anon shouting aloud, either bidding the obedient kine to walk faster, or calling back any cow which has strayed from the right path. They proceed by threes, or fours, or sixes, in a row, according to the breadth of the road, which is not always a constant quantity; they kick up a great deal of dust, as the roads are never watered except by heaven; they block up sometimes the whole road—the women, with *kulsis* of water on their waist, standing on both sides to make room for them. In this fashion Govinda takes his cows home; ties them to their respective stalls in the cow-house; fills their tubs

with chopped straw, water, and cakes of mustard oil; milks some of them, with the assistance of Kálamánik; makes a good fire, or rather smoke, of cow-dung cakes to drive away mosquitoes and fleas; and then shuts up the cow-house for the night—and with it we also shut up this chapter.

CHAPTER XXIII.

GOVINDA'S FRIENDS.

The friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,
Grapple them to thy soul with hoops of steel

Hamlet.

THE system of caste prevents the different classes of Hindus from full social intercourse with one another. Águris will not eat and intermarry with any that do not belong to that caste; and the same is true of the thirty-six castes into which the whole Hindu community in Bengal is said to be divided; but, short of eating, drinking, and intermarrying, there is a good deal of intercourse and kindly feeling between members of different castes. An Águri may have a *goálá* (milkman), or a *sadgopa* (agricultural caste), or a man of any other caste, as his most intimate friend, although they may not enjoy

each other's company at dinner—a thing somewhat unintelligible to the dinner-loving Anglo-Saxon, who, we suspect, can hardly conceive of friendship, except through the stomach. Amongst the different classes of the peasantry and artisans of Bengal, there is a vast deal of friendly intercourse; and it is by no means an uncommon thing for lads of different castes to vow eternal friendship with one another. The friendships of which we are now speaking are not unlike those we read of among the ancient Hellenes, as in the mythical story of Damon and Pythias, the half-legendary tale of Harmodios and Aristogeiton; and some instances of which are charmingly told us in the *Dialogues* of the “Attic Bee.” But it is impossible to avoid the suspicion, especially from the lively descriptions of Plato, that, generally speaking, there was something morally rotten in those outwardly graceful friendships, and that a Hellenic *erastês* was not always a virtuous friend. The friendships of the peasant youth of Bengal, however, are generally virtuous and disinterested. One peasant boy vows eternal friendship with another peasant boy, or with a boy of the artisan class, and the fact is not only

known to the parents and relatives of both—and the same was doubtless true, in most cases, of the Hellenic *erastai*—but the formation of the sacred tie is ratified and strengthened by exchanges of presents. Two friends, of the sort of which we are speaking, do not mention each other's names; the one calls the other, whether in private or in public, simply *friend*. Youthful friendship amongst the Grecians seems to have been excessively jealous—an *erastés* guarding the youth he loved almost with the same jealousy with which a man guards his wife. Friendship amongst the youthful peasants of Bengal is different. Indeed, a Bengali peasant lad has generally three friends, all of them close and intimate; and there does not seem to be the slightest jealousy manifested by them. The three friends have three different names. A boy generally has a *sángát*, a *bandhu*, and a *mitá*—all meaning the same thing, namely, friend. But when one peasant boy says to another peasant boy “You are my *sángát*,” he can never become his *bandhu* or *mitá*; the *sángát* remains *sángát* all his life: and the same is true of the *bandhu* and the *mitá*. Nor do these words indicate different degrees of intimacy,

as a boy is equally intimate with all three. A *mitá* is usually one's namesake, but this is by no means invariably the case. Our hero, who was a sociable spirit, contracted in early life friendship with three lads of about the same age with himself, a short account of each of whom, as they will sometimes appear on the scene in the course of this narrative, it is desirable to give here.

The *sángát* of Govinda was Nanda, the son of Kuvera Karmakár, the blacksmith of the village. Kuvera was a tall thin man, strong built, and muscular; with a rather high forehead; with eyebrows joined together over the root of the nose, which was aquiline in shape; his bright black eyes were sunk deep in their sockets; and his lower lip was ever and anon put upon the upper one—a sure sign of determination of character. He was probably the hardest worked man in the village. As he was the only blacksmith at Kánchanpur his hands were full of work. All day from early dawn to a late hour in the night, the forge was ablaze; and every now and then large pieces of iron, like broken fragments of the “sheeted lightning” used to be

put on the anvil and hammered and stretched to the requisite size. The *kámársálú* (smithy) was always crowded with people come on business. One has come to get his ploughshare mended, another his *kaṭári* (bill-hook), a third his *káste* (sickle), a fourth his *kuḍul* (axe), a fifth his *koḍáli* (hoe); a woman has come to get her *bonṭi* (a sort of sickle used in the kitchen) toothed; a *páṭhsálú* boy has come to get his rude penknife sharpened by the addition to the blade of a little steel which he has brought with him; while a lot of peasant boys are sitting there for fishing hooks which Kuvera has promised to make for them. Kuvera was assisted in the smithy by his son Nanda, who was the very picture of his father, and who bade fair to become one of the best blacksmiths in the whole district, almost equal to Visvakarmá—the Hephaestos of the Hindus. This lad, about sixteen years old, was our hero's *sángát*; and Govinda saw him in the smithy almost every evening after discharging his pastoral duties in the cow-house.

Govinda's *bandhu* was Kapila, the son of Ságara Mistri, a carpenter. Having never been to Calcutta, and being employed only in village carpentry, Ságara had

never made chairs or tables, since those articles of furniture are not used by either the Hindu gentry or peasantry, except a few of the former, who have formed Anglicised tastes. But he could make excellent sleeping *kháts* (wooden bedsteads), richly carved at the head, boxes of all sizes and of various sorts of wood, neat *pinḍás* (flat stools) of jack-wood, stools of every description, doors and window-frames, and *pálkis* (palanquins), better than those made at Vardhamána, and almost equalling in fineness those manufactured at Kapáliṭolá, in Calcutta. But that in which he chiefly excelled was the making of earthen images of the Hindu gods, which, though constructed in Calcutta by potters, were made at Kánchanpur by carpenters. His skill was every year called forth, especially at the time of the Durgá Pújá, the image of which goddess he made almost to perfection, according to village ideas of perfection in mud sculpture. All the inhabitants of the village used to be in raptures with the image of Durgá and her group which Ságara made for the zamindár of Kánchanpur. The women declared that the images were so life-like that speech and locomotion were

only wanting to make them living gods and goddesses, while the painted canopy above the images they extolled as a piece of perfect painting. But Ságara exercised other functions than those of a carpenter, a mud modeller, and a painter: he made, or rather the women in his house made, and sold *chidá*. I don't know how the case stands in other parts of Bengal, but in the district of Vardhamána, at any rate in the village of Kánchanpur, *chidá* was always made and sold by carpenters, though I confess I see little connection between carpentry and *chidá*-making. But what is *chidá*? the English reader will ask. It is rice soaked in water, and then taken out and flattened by means of the pedal or the rice-husker. This when dried by exposure is called *chidá*, largely eaten by the peasantry with curds and treacle, or fried dry, in which state it is recommended by Bengali physicians to convalescent patients as a light diet. Kapila, the *bandhu* of Govinda, inherited the many-sided genius of his father, and could with equal facility make a jack-wood *pinḍá*, paint Durgá, and flatten rice.

Govinda's *mitá* was Madan, the son of Kási

Datta, one of the *mudis* or grocers of the village. I have called Kási a grocer, though he dealt in scarcely any articles sold by European and American grocers. Webster, in his Dictionary, says, that a grocer is one who deals in "tea, sugar, spices, coffee, liquors, fruits, &c." Kási *mudi* had no fruits in his shop, though some of the Calcutta *mudis* sell plantains and cocoa-nuts; he sold no liquors, and, if he had sold them, he would have been excommunicated, and would have lost his caste; of coffee, neither he nor his village-men had ever heard the name; spices of some kinds he certainly had; sugar he perhaps had, but chiefly, I suspect, in the shape of molasses; and, though he had heard the name of *tchá*, or tea, he had none in his shop, as no one in the village, not even the rich zamindár himself, drank it. What did he sell then? He sold rice, paddy, pulse of various sorts, salt, mustard oil, cocoa-nut oil, ginger, turmeric, tobacco, pepper-corns, coriander seed, cummin seed, *tejpát* (*Laurus cassia*), betel nut, betel leaf, cardamums (of both sorts, the bigger, and the smaller, usually called Gujráthi), nutmegs, treacle, &c., &c. Govinda's *mitá* Madan,

the retail merchant to be, assisted his father in selling articles in the shop, and in going out in the evenings to the houses of customers, for payment of bills. Govinda fixed upon this lad as his *mitá*, as, though he was called Madan by every body in the village, his zodiacal or astronomical name—and every Hindu has his astronomical name determined by the position of the sun in the zodiac, at the time of his birth—was Govinda.

Such were the three friends of our hero—his *síngát*, his *bandhu*, and his *mitá*—with whom he was very intimate, and to whom he communicated his secrets, his joys, his griefs, and who in their turn reposed in him the like confidence. But, besides these three bosom friends, there were three other lads who, though neither *síngát*, *bandhu*, nor *mitá*, were his companions and associates, and to whom, therefore, the term “friend,” in a loose and general sense, may not improperly be applied.

One of these was Chatura, the son of Gangá Nápit, the family barber of Badan. He had lately begun to ply his razor on the foreheads and chins

of people; and though he was not yet very skilful in what is reckoned the most difficult branch of the craft, viz., the paring of nails, yet it was generally admitted that he was no unworthy scion of a noble barber's house. In addition to shaving, Chatura, like his father, had taken to surgery, for in the villages of Bengal the barber discharges the duties of a chirurgeon; and I have been told by persons competent to form an opinion on this difficult subject that the skill shown by Chatura, young and inexperienced as he was, in lancing boils, drawing teeth, cutting corns, extracting thorns from the soles of peasants' feet, and setting dislocated bones, was so great that there was scarcely any doubt that in time he would vastly excel his father in reputation as a surgeon. Under the auspices of his father he was also getting initiated into the mysteries of births, marriages, and deaths, in all of which the barber, like the priest, plays so prominent a part. Chatura was quick-witted like his race, who are said to be as shrewd amongst men as the jackal is amongst quadrupeds, and the crow amongst bipeds possessing feathers; and those who knew him best

declared that his intellect, though he had not had the benefit of *páṭhśálá* training, was as keen as the edge of the razor he wielded.

Another of our hero's companions was Rasamaya, the son of a *modaka* or confectioner. I do not know that any other nation in the world consumes so many sweetmeats as the higher and middle classes of the people of Bengal. In other countries sweets and comfits are for the most part eaten by children; in Bengal they are eaten as much by grown men and women as by children. In some feasts all the courses consist of sweetmeats from beginning to end. Is this the reason why the Bengalis have not left off their state of pupilage as a nation? But whether this is the case or not, the fact is undoubted that Bengalis consume an immense quantity of sweetmeats. Hence confectioners are as plentiful in the land as crows. Kánchanpur was famous for one sort of sweetmeats which were not so well made in any other village of Bengal. As Vardhamána is celebrated for its *olá*, Chandernagore for its *rasagollá*, Mánkar for its *kadmá*, Dhaniyákháli for its *khaichur*, Sántipur for its *moá*,

Birbhum for its *morobbá*, Vishnupur for its *matichur*, Ambiká for its *suatolú-monda*, so Kánchanpur was famous for its *khájá*, which may truly be said to be the rájá (king) of sweetmeats. Vardhamána certainly gets the credit of this monarch of sweetmeats, as well as of *olú* ; but those who are well acquainted with the matter know that the best manufacturers of *khájá* in Vardhamána are all natives of Kánchanpur ; and of these Rasamaya's father was the most distinguished. Badan, as a husbandman, was not in circumstances to buy sweetmeats for his son or for his wife—the only sweetmeat consumed by the peasantry being, besides treacle in its raw unmanufactured state, *mudki*—that is, parched paddy (with the husk taken off) dipped in treacle—and in high days and holidays *pátáli* ; but thanks to Govinda's friendship with Rasamaya, he was not unfrequently presented with sweetmeats used by the higher classes, and especially with *khájá*, the rájá of confectionery.

The last companion of Govinda we shall mention is Bokárám, the son of a weaver—indeed, the son of that identical weaver to whom Alanga had given

threads of her own spinning for weaving a *dhuti* for our hero, when he ceased for the first time to revel in his infantile state of Adamic nudity. Lancashire weavers are, we believe, very sharp—some say a little too sharp—in their dealings; but we know not how it is that the Bengal weaver has, from time out of mind, been noted for his stupidity. In point of mental acuteness, he is the very antipodes of the barber. Bokárám did no discredit to his caste, as he possessed no ordinary degree of stupidity. His friends used to say that Providence had meant to make him an ass, but through inadvertence made him into a man. But though his head was a block, he had a good heart, and was ready to help his friends to the utmost of his power. Govinda never asked his advice in any matter, as he had no great respect for his understanding, but valued him greatly for the transparent sincerity and perfect guilelessness of his character.

Our hero may, I think, be congratulated on the choice he made of his friends and associates, as each of them was noted for some one good quality in a high degree of development:—Nanda for great

energy and physical activity, Kapila for his æsthetic taste and artistic skill, Madan for prudence, Chatura for shrewdness, Rasamaya for cheerfulness, and Bokárám for sincerity.

CHAPTER XXIV.

GREAT SENSATION IN THE VILLAGE.

O horror ! horror ! horror ! tongue nor heart
Cannot conceive, nor name thee !

Macbeth.

ONE summer noon the people of Kánchanpur were in tremendous excitement. About the fifth or sixth *danda* of that morning, the second daughter of Padma Lochan Pál—the same who had a sugar-cane field into which one of Govinda's cows had strayed—a girl of about six years of age, came out of her house to the street and began to play with other girls. It is usual with little boys and girls who go out to play, to come home about nine o'clock to eat some *mudī* and *mudki*, or to drink some milk. Yádumani (for that was the name of the girl) had hitherto always come at that hour to her mother to eat something ; but that day

she did not come at the usual time. Her mother became somewhat anxious. She said to her eldest daughter—"Where is Yádumani, that she has not yet come to eat *khábár* (food)?" The girl replied that she had seen her sister go out about an hour or two before, and that perhaps she was playing with some girls in the street. The mother went to the outer door of the house facing the street, and called out—"Yádumani! *O lo Yádu!* come and eat your *khábár*." But no Yádumani answered. She asked some of the passers-by whether they had seen the girl; they replied in the negative. Padma Pál, who was in the *chandimandap* (an outhouse for sitting), on hearing the voice of his wife, went to the outer door, and said—"Why are you so anxious about Yádumani? She is gone somewhere to play—perhaps to the smithy or to the Bráhmaṇ's house—and will be here presently. You had better go in." The wife obeyed, but somehow or other she had in her mind a foreboding of some evil to come. With a heavy heart she went into the house, and resumed her operations in the kitchen. But she had hardly any mind to cook. Her body was in the kitchen, but her mind was away in all parts

of the village in search of her daughter. I was going to say the village clock struck twelve—not remembering that villages in Bengal have not clocks as in England—well, two *praharas* of the day were nearly over, that is, it was near noon, and Yádumani had not yet come for her *khábár*. The anxious mother had left the kitchen a dozen times and asked everyone that passed by whether he had seen her daughter. An hour more elapsed and it was nearly the time of *bhát khábár* (eating rice), and yet no news of the missing girl. It was then that Padma Pál himself was alarmed. As for his poor wife, her eyes were filled with tears, her heart was beating like a pedal, and she was half dead with fright. She could not contain any longer. She burst out crying “O my Yádumani! my darling! my treasure! Why have you not come to eat your *khábár*? Where are you, my darling?” All the men, women, and children of the adjoining houses ran to Padma Pál’s house to inquire what the matter was. The news that Padma Pál’s second daughter was missing ran through the village like the blaze of a hedge of the reed *sar* set on fire. Though it was the dinner hour, all the people

of the village—men, women, and children—came out of their houses to search for the girl. The sympathy of the whole village was excited—and Bengalis are a very sympathizing people, let foreigners say what they please. Every street was searched, every house, every bush and thicket, every mango tope, every tamarind grove, every plantain garden, in the outskirts of the village. All the bathing *gháts* of all the tanks of the village were examined, and two or three little pools in the neighbourhood of Padma Pál's house were dragged through with drag-nets, and though large quantities of fish were caught, the body of Yádumani was not found. The grief of all the people was indescribable. Most of them that day went without their dinner, for they were all diligent in the search. Parties went off in different directions to make fresh search. The fishermen of the village—and there was a good lot of them, as the Bengalis are an essentially piscivorous race—brought out all their largest drag-nets, and offered to drag all the tanks; but the name of those tanks was legion, and dragging them all was not the work of a day: indeed, some of them,

as the reader knows, could not be dragged through. Every nook and corner of the village was searched, but in vain. The lamentations of the people were loud. As for the poor mother, she rent the air with terrific screams, fell down on the ground, and rolled in the dust writhing with agony, just as a kid, whose neck has been half cut by an unskilful sacrificer, writhes in pain on the altar of some image of the Moloch-like goddess Káli. The sun was just setting behind the lofty tamarind trees of the village, and yet no clue to the fate of the missing girl had been found. The whole village was filled with horror. But murder will "out."

Govinda Sámanta, our hero, had been the whole day with his cows, which were grazing on an uncultivated patch of land in the outskirts of the village, excepting the short time when he had come home for his meal; and it was at that time that he had heard of the mysterious disappearance of the second daughter of Padma Pál, or as Govinda and his companions called him, Podo Pál. Not far from the place where Govinda's cows were grazing, his father and uncle were working in the fields; for the reader

must remember that the few acres of land which Badan cultivated did not lie in one side of the village, but were in various places. At sunset Govinda was bringing his cows home. They came in a line, climbed up the high embankment of the tank Krishnaságara, went down the slope on the other side, going very near the water's edge, as cows are accustomed to do. One of the cows, wishing to drink water, went to the edge, and put her fore-legs fairly into the water, but in a moment she started back and ran up the embankment. Another cow, which was behind, came up to the same spot, and was stooping to drink, when she too started back, apparently with fright, and ran up the embankment. Govinda, who noticed both, naturally thought that the cows must have seen something unusual, otherwise they would not have turned away from the water without drinking. Going to the spot, what should he see but a human corpse floating at some yards' distance from the shore, half-covered by the aquatic plants. As his father and uncle were coming behind he shouted to them, and in a moment they joined him. They inferred from the size of the

corpse, and from the profusion of hair on its head, that it was the body of a little girl, and they had no doubt in their minds that it was the corpse of Yádu-mani, whom they had often seen. The news was soon spread, and the whole village came to the tank. But how was the body to be brought to land? The reader will recollect that the Krishnaságara was regarded with mysterious awe, and that scarcely any person dipped his feet in any other part of the tank than at the bathing *gháṭs*, which were sadly out of repair. Amongst the hundreds of spectators crowding the slope of the embankment down to the water's edge, none offered to undertake the task. At last, Kála-mánik, the boldest man in the village, went down into the water, swam up to the corpse, and dragged it ashore. The crowd shrieked with horror; there was no mistaking it—it was the veritable Yádumani, but without life, without clothes, without her silver ornaments. The poor child had been evidently murdered for the sake of the jewels on her person.

The question now was, not as it would have been in other countries—who was the murderer?—but

whether the body should be burnt that very night or not. The pressing necessity of an immediate solution of the question will be apparent to every one who remembers that Hindus consider it a great calamity and a great sin if the body of a deceased person is not burnt within twenty-four hours after his death. The invariable practice is to perform the rite of cremation immediately after the spirit has left its clayey tenement. But in the present case it was contrary to law to burn the body without the knowledge and sanction of the police. It was therefore deemed advisable to ask the advice of the zamindár of the village. The landlord, as an orthodox Hindu, was for immediate cremation; but to guard against unpleasant consequences he sent for the police-constable of the village, called *phán-ḍidúr*, and ordered him (for he was the zamindár's humble and obedient servant) not to send a report of the affair to the *tháná* (police-station) of Mantresvar, which was the head police-station of Parganá Sáhábád, in which Kánchanpur was situated. On receiving a *douceur* the *phánḍidúr* agreed to hush up the matter. The corpse was then that very

night taken from the Krishnaságara to another tank, where the remains of all the deceased persons of that part of the village were usually burnt, and the rite of cremation was duly performed.

Next morning the whole village were on the alert to discover, if possible, the perpetrator of that atrocious deed. One old woman came forward and said that she had seen, the day before, at about eleven o'clock, Yádumani going along with Bejá Bágdi and his sister towards Krishnaságara. Scores of people immediately ran to the hut of Bejá Bágdi, caught hold of him and of his sister, and dragged them to the Cutcherry of the zamindár. On the way the culprits were half killed with slaps, blows, cuffs, and kicks of the angry multitude. The zamindár ordered them to be tortured till they confessed the crime. The bamboo torture soon compelled them to make a clean breast of the affair. They said that they had enticed away the girl from the street, where she was playing, with the promise of giving her some fine mangoes, that they had taken all her ornaments, which were only of silver, killed her, and hid the corpse among the

flags of the Krishnaságara. I need scarcely say, that at this confession, the crowd, almost maddened with rage, poured such a hailstorm of blows, kicks, and cuffs, upon the culprits, that they were almost within an inch of their lives. But the question was—what was to be done to them? They could not be handed over to the police, for that would have put both Padma Pál and the zamindár into a scrape, for having burnt the corpse without the knowledge and permission of the police. The zamindár resolved to expel the murderers from the village, warning them, that if they returned to the village, they would be handed over to the police, and hanged. There and then the miscreants were expelled from the village, accompanied with a whirlwind of abuse, and a hailstorm of brickbats and old shoes. Thanks to the easy virtue of the village constable, the higher police authorities never got a scent of this affair.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE VILLAGE MARKET.

Some, burthened with their homely ware,
Journey to village hát or fair.

H. H. Wilson.

Háts, that is markets, whether held weekly or twice in the week, are a very useful institution; they not only supply with the necessities of life the inhabitants of those little *hamlets* in which there are no shops, but also promote social intercourse between people of different villages. The *hát* of Kánchanpur, as the reader knows already, was held on Tuesdays and Saturdays on a plain in the south-west corner of the village. It was not a large one compared with the monstrous *háts* held in other parts of the country, especially in Eastern Bengal, still it was a pretty good one, being attended by between two and three

hundred people. There were no sheds of any kind erected in it, so that if a shower came on, the *hút* would be dispersed—the only protection against rain being a few trees on the spot, especially that gigantic banyan tree of which we have already spoken. On market days almost every family in the village sent one of its members to the *hút* to buy whatever was needed. Kálamánik and Govinda both regularly went to *hút*, but with different objects. Kálamánik went to sell, whereas our hero went to buy. It was customary with Badan to hoard up in the *marúi* (granary) a quantity of paddy sufficient to supply all the members of the family with food from one harvest to another; and if there happened to be a surplus, it was converted into rice and sold in the village *hút*, especially when rice became dear; and sometimes Kálamánik bought rice in distant *húts* and sold it at an advantage in the *hút* of his own village. It was not much that he had to sell, usually two sacks of rice on the back of a bullock. Govinda went to buy for the family a few necessary articles which, though procurable in the village shops, were sold at lower prices in the *hút*. The two weekly markets

were not called the market of Tuesday and the market of Saturday; they were almost always named according to the number of days which elapsed between one market day and another. Thus the market of Tuesday was called the *market of three*, because three clear days intervened between that day and the following Saturday; and the market of Saturday was called the *market of two*, because there are only two days intervening between that day and the following Tuesday. Usually more things are sold in a *market of three* than in a *market of two*, as people lay in more provisions on the former occasion than on the latter.

Let my reader accompany Govinda to a *hát of three*. Scarcely have you come to the outskirts of the village when your ears are regaled with the buzz, as it were, of many millions of bees, wafted through the surrounding groves of mango, and the long avenues of the *asvatha* and the tamarind. The buzz increases in loudness as you proceed, and it becomes quite deafening when you are fairly on the scene of action. For a good, varied, and rich noise commend us to a village *hát*. The noise of a mob

on Trafalgar Square, or on the boulevards of Paris, is nothing to it. A London or a Paris mob may have in it a larger number of people than most *húts* in Bengal, but all who make up that mob do not speak at the same time; whereas in a village *hút* every one, without exception, whether he be a buyer or a seller, is, at the same moment of time, speaking in an assembly of some hundreds at the top of his voice.

The first thing you notice as you enter the *hát* is a large number of red-looking bran-new *hánḍis* (cooking-pots) and earthen vessels of all sorts and shapes, both on your right and on your left: those have been brought from a neighbouring village, and are sure to have a good sale, as there is not a single potter at Káchanpur. The sellers of goods have formed themselves into five long rows or streets, most of whom are squatting on the bare ground, a few on gunny bags spread upon the earth, and fewer still on low wooden stools; while the articles for sale are put out, according to their nature, either on the ground, or in gunny bags, or in baskets. One row you see entirely filled with greens and

vegetables, the names of which it were endless to mention; for of greens the people of Bengal eat an infinite variety, excepting only those which are either poisonous or noxious in any other way: and as to other vegetables their name is legion. Greens and vegetables, indeed, require to be numerous, as Bengalis are thorough vegetarians; the only animal food they use being milk, clarified butter, and fish. Amongst the vegetables exposed for sale you notice some curious ones. A woman here has in her basket bright-red radishes, each about three feet long; a man there has pumpkins and gourds of monstrous size; a third has that wonderfully rich and nutritious fruit, though somewhat disagreeable to the taste, called *kántál* or jack fruit, each of which weighs forty pounds avoirdupois. But what in the name of wonder is that curious looking fruit, resembling a huge boa-constrictor, and measuring about two yards in length? It is the *chichingá*, or snake-gourd, the *Trichosanthes anguina* of botanists. One of these snake-gourds is amply sufficient to furnish a large family with breakfast and dinner when made into curry and eaten along with boiled rice. A stranger

looking at the long array of greens and vegetables might mistake that part of the *hát* for an agricultural show, if he did not know that they constituted the chief food of the people.

The second row consists of grocers and confectioners, and infinitely varied are the articles exposed for sale in that range. You have a hundred sorts of spices, spices for cooking, for *pán*, and for other purposes; of sweetmeats you have every variety, from the humble *mudki* and *pátáli* to the delicate *khájá*—the king of the tribe. This row is frequented chiefly by the village boys—and both the pedagogues of the village give their boys half-school on market-days—who with one pice (somewhat less than a halfpenny) in each one's waist—I cannot say *pocket*, for a genuine village Bengali boy having no pocket, keeps little sums of money wrapped in the folds of his *dhuti* around the waist—are standing before the confectioners, and debating in their minds what sweetmeat they should select. Nor is the debate an idle one; for with a halfpenny a boy may get a large quantity of *mudki* or *phuṭkalái*, a good number of *kadmás*, or a considerable bit of *pátáli*.

A third row consists chiefly of clothes exposed for sale by those who have woven them—inelegant and coarse, but stout and lasting, and therefore good for husbandmen and the working classes. A fourth row displays country-made cutlery—plough-shares, hoes, sickles, bill-hooks, *bouñis*, axes, knives, *kátaris*, &c., &c., all the implements of husbandry, village carpentry, masonry, and cookery. A fifth row consists of articles manufactured from leather, like shoes, or rather slippers—for the majority of Bengalis use only slippers and not shoes, boots being of course out of the question—thongs, toys, and other nondescript things; while apart from all the rows, under the magnificent banyan tree already spoken of, are on one side, paddy and rice sellers with their bullocks, and on the other a lot of fisherwomen, selling an infinite variety of fish, from the Liliputian *punñi* to the Brobdignagian *boál* and *rohita*.

Who is that up-country man with a red turban on his head, and a large basket in his hand, accompanied by a man who looks like a clerk? It is the zamindár's servant, who has come to take *tolá* (rent), for the landlord of the village, from every

trader in the market. The piece of ground on which the *húť* is held, belongs to the zamindár of the village, for which ground no one pays him rent; the landlord, therefore, reimburses himself by taking, on each market day, from every trader a small quantity of the goods in which he deals. Should the commodities be valuable, like cloth or jewels, a few pice are paid as an equivalent for the articles. I need hardly say that, by adopting this method of remunerating himself, the zamindár gets a hundred times more than he would have obtained if he had charged a fair rent for the ground; and yet there can be no doubt that the traders themselves prefer the zamindár's method, to paying a monthly sum. Who is that Mahomedan-looking man, with a long beard, a skull-cap on his head, and a bâton in his hand, followed by a coolie with a basket? He is the *phándílár* (police constable), of the village. He has also come for his *tolú*; and, though the traders do not give him as much as they give to the zamindár, yet they give him something, as they are afraid of incurring his displeasure. Half-a-dozen boys are also going the

round of the stalls, to raise *tolá* for the Bráhmaṇ *gurumahúśaya* (schoolmaster), of the village; but the poor pedagogue, though he gets a little from some of the traders, gets a great deal less than the police constable. But there is a fourth *tolá*-raiser, going about from stall to stall with a basket in his hand. He is a Bráhmaṇ, exacting a tax for the village *bároúripujá* (joint-stock idol worship), which is held annually at Káñchanpur, attended with much pomp and many exhibitions, and for the expenses of which each seller of goods is bound to give something on each market day.

The *hút* began at about one o'clock in the afternoon. It is now four o'clock, and business is at its height. Both buyers and sellers are speaking their loudest, and the noise is deafening. The scene is a perfect Babel. It is not only the confusion of tongues, but the confusion of tongues worse confounded. But, lo! who is that European gentleman who has just entered the *hút*, and is standing in the shade of that big *vaṭa* tree to which I have so often alluded, with a Bábu-looking person beside him, and a coolie with a bag under his arm? At

the sight of the *Sáheb* a number of people leave off bargaining and rush towards him. The Bábu opens a book which he has with him, and begins to read. Govinda and scores of other people listen attentively. It is something about God, about sin and salvation, about a Saviour for the children of men. Govinda distinctly heard the name *Jesu Khrishṭa*. The fact is, the Rev. Friedrich Kleinknecht, a German clergyman connected with the Church Missionary Society, was out itinerating in the district of Vardhamána, and had, in the course of his evangelistic peregrinations, reached Kánchanpur that very afternoon, and was now taking advantage of the *húṭ* to preach the Gospel to the people. From the way in which the people salute the reverend gentleman, and the nature of the questions they put him, it seems that he is no stranger to them. The truth is, Mr. Kleinknecht's station is Kánáináṭśálá, on the suburbs of the town of Vardhamána, only seven miles distant from Kánchanpur; he had therefore been often in the village and preached at the *húṭ* as well as at Sivatalá, as the middle part of the village, where there were two temples, was called, and had

sometimes visited some of the influential inhabitants in their houses. As Mr. Kleinknecht was very affable in his manners, and had no hauteur or arrogance in his demeanour towards the children of the soil—as he was exceedingly simple in his habits, like most Germans—as he never lost temper in his discussions with Hindus, though it was sorely tried by the irrelevant arguments and incoherent reasonings of his opponents—as he sometimes gave medicines to the poor people of the village if sick at the time of his annual visit—and as he spoke the Bengali language almost like a Bengali (and Germans, as a rule, speak Bengali better than Englishmen), excepting now and then confounding his b's with his p's—he was universally liked by the inhabitants of Káncanpur; indeed, little boys used to go up to him, and, catching his coat-tails, used to say—"Padre Sáheb, *salám*."

Such was the missionary who now stood under the gigantic *vaṭa* tree in the market-place of Káncanpur. After his catechist had read a chapter of one of the Gospels—and I have been told that it was the eleventh chapter of the Gospel of St. Matthew—and had briefly expounded it to the crowd, which was receiving acces-

sion of listeners every minute, Mr. Kleinknecht addressed the people, taking for his text—"Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." The reverend gentleman drew such a vivid picture of the sorrows and sufferings of humanity, and manifested such glowing sympathy for the labouring poor, that the audience (the majority of whom were of that class) seemed to be greatly affected. While the preacher was going on with his subject with great earnestness and fluency, one here and another there exclaimed—"All that the Padre Sáheb is saying is quite true!" When, however, he touched on the last clause of the text and spoke of the eternal rest as the gift of the Saviour, he did not seem to carry along with him the sympathy of his audience. At the conclusion of the address a discussion followed, in which some Bráhmans and Káyasthas took part, but the arguments of which it is here unnecessary to detail. At the close of the discussion, Christian tracts written in the Bengali language were distributed gratuitously among the people, who showed such eagerness to obtain them that they trod upon one another's toes, and nearly threw the missionary and his catechist off

their legs. In the *melée* our hero got hold of a tract entitled the *Satya Áśraya* ("The True Refuge") which he took home and used occasionally to read. As the sun had already set, the *hát* broke up, and buyers and sellers wended their way homewards—some to Káchanpur, and others to neighbouring villages.

CHAPTER XXVI.

LADIES' PARLIAMENT.

But chief do India's simple daughters,
Assemble in these hallowed waters,
With vase of classic model laden,
Like Grecian girl or Tuscan maiden,
Collecting thus their urns to fill
From gushing fount, or trickling rill.

H. H. Wilson.

THOUGH Bengali women in the villages visit one another in their houses for friendly conversation, nowhere do so many women meet together and talk on so many different subjects—village politics not excluded—as at the bathing *gháts* of those tanks to which they resort for their daily ablutions. I have already told the reader that Káncanpur has a great many large and beautiful tanks, but all of them were not popular for bathing purposes. The two tanks in

the village which were resorted to by the largest number of bathers were the *Himságara* in the south, and the *Ráya's* tank in the north of the village. As Badan lived in the northern division of the village, the members of his family all bathed every day in the *Ráya's* tank, so called from the zamindár, who belonged to the *Ráya* family. It had two bathing *gháts*, one for men, and the other for women, and they are so situated with respect to each other, that the men who bathe in the one *ghát* cannot see the women who bathe in the other. Both have flights of steps built of masonry, going pretty far into the tank, which is very deep. These steps are enclosed by walls of masonry, which, however, do not rise above the surface of the water. At the head of the steps is a large floor, also of masonry, where the people, after coming out of the water, wipe their bodies, their hair, and sometimes change their wet clothes for dry ones, though the general custom is to go home, however distant, in wet clothes. On two sides of the floor are two *tulasi* plants, raised above the floor by masonry work.

If the reader wishes to listen to a conversation

carried on by a number of women, let him accompany me about the middle of the day, say between eleven and twelve o'clock, to the women's *ghát* of the *Ráya's* tank. It is, however an expedition attended with some peril, for if we are seen standing near the *ghát*, and listening to the conversation going on, we are sure to be called all sorts of names, and abused as Bengali women only can abuse. We must therefore get to the *ghát* some one or two hours before, and conceal ourselves among the thick foliage of a sacred *sriphal* tree (*Ægle Marmelos*) which stands just a little beyond the floor.

It is eleven o'clock. The women are dropping in one by one. Most of them are bringing with them brass *kalasis* (water-vases), and a few have earthen ones, in which they intend taking home drinking water, and which they all put down on the floor described above. Their faces are all looking glossy, for they have been well rubbed with oil. Women of all ages, of all ranks, of all castes except the very lowest, are there. There is a venerable-looking old woman of seventy, all her hair white as flax. She has no *kalasi*, as she is too feeble to

carry one filled with water. There are matrons thirty and forty years old, women of twenty, and blooming girls of sweet sixteen—in England they call it “sweet seventeen”; in Bengal the sixteenth year of a Hindu young lady is thought to be the sweetest and most charming. Some of them, you observe, are very handsome in their features, and their complexion is like the whiteness of milk mixed with the redness of the *alakta* (*lac*), a colour which most Bengalis prefer to the snowy whiteness of the European. The quantity of jewels, most of them of pure gold, with which the persons of many of them are loaded, shows that they belong to the aristocracy of the village. Most of the women, shortly after their arrival at the *ghát*, sit down on the steps of the water’s edge, rub their teeth with a black dentifrice, called *misi*, which each woman has brought with her wrapped in a bit of paper, gargle their mouths for a full quarter of an hour, and begin scouring their feet with their *gámchhá* (bathing towels). They then go down the steps—with their clothes on, of course—and stand in the water up to the chin. In this position the

rubbing of the body commences, the object of which is to take off the oil with which every part of the body has been anointed. Then, the rubbing over, they dip their heads in water I know not how many dozens of times, and remain standing there up to their chin for a long time, for they seem to enjoy bathing very much. Various parties are, of course, engaged in various operations. Some have already bathed, have filled their *kalasis* with water, and are going away, others have just come, others are rinsing their teeth, others are sitting on the steps and rubbing their feet, others are standing chin-deep in water, and a few others, especially Bráhmāni women, are engaged in reciting prayers. During all these operations lively conversation is going on, and there is no lack of either talkers or listeners, for at any moment between eleven and one o'clock you are sure to find at the *ghát* at least twenty women.

A woman who is rubbing her feet sees another woman preparing to go, and says to her,

“Sister, why are you going away so soon? You have not to cook; why are you then going so soon?”

“Sister, I shall have to cook to-day. The elder *bou* is not well to-day: she was taken ill last night.”

“But you have not to cook much. You have no feast in your house?”

“No; no feast, certainly. But my sister has come from Devagrāma with her son. And the fisherman has given us a large *rohita*, which must be cooked.”

“Oh! you have guests in your house. And what are you going to cook?”

“I am going to cook *dál* of *máshkalúi*, one *tarkári*, *baḍi* fried, fish fried, fish with peppercorns, fish with tamarind, and another dish, of which my sister’s son is very fond, namely, *ámḍái* with poppy-seed.”

“The everlasting *baḍi* and poppy-seed. You banias are very fond of these two things. We Bráhmans do not like either of them.”

“The reason why you Bráhmans do not like *baḍis* is that you do not know how to make them well. If you once taste our *baḍi* you will not forget it for seven months. You would wish to eat it every

day. As for poppy-seed, what excellent curry it makes."

"Why, sister, you are so eloquent in the praise of *baḍi*, that my mouth is almost watering. If I were not a Bráhmāni woman I would have tasted your *baḍi*."

"Never mind, though you are a Bráhman, once taste my *baḍi*. *Baḍi* will not destroy your caste."

So saying, the banker woman went away with the *kalasi* on her waist.

Another woman who was in water up to her chin, addressing another woman sitting on the steps, says; "When did you get that ornament, *Sai*?"

"Which do you mean, *Sai*? This *jhumko*, you mean, I got it only two days ago. *Silhe* goldsmith has made it. You like it?"

"Oh, that's exceedingly well made. There is no end to your ornaments. You are covered with jewels from head to foot. You are lucky in getting a husband who makes it the chief business of his life to please you."

"I hope, *Sai*, you have also got a good husband. They also say he loves you very much."

“My husband loves me very much! *Há!* *Vidhátá!* Jackals and dogs weep and howl at my misery.”

“Why? what great misery are you suffering? You are not in want of clothes, of food, or of any of the necessities of life; and he loves you very much, they all say.”

“He gives me clothes, certainly, but they are not half so nice as yours. Food also he gives me, but everyone eats food, even dogs. And as for his loving me, what is the use of *dry love*? But what can I say? All this misery has been written on my forehead. There is no escaping it except by death. I shall be happy when I die.”

“Oh, *sai*, why are you so sad about nothing? Ornaments are no sign of a husband’s love. A man may load his wife’s person with ornaments, and yet may not love her. I have heard many rich people of Calcutta are of this sort. Their wives are adorned in every limb, and have jewels the very names of which I never heard; and yet those rich Bábus seldom sleep at night at home. They sleep at Máchhuá Bázár. But your husband is very good;

after candlelight he never goes out of doors; he is very gentle; he never beats you, nor rebukes you. What do you want more? It is true, he has not given you many ornaments. But is it his wish not to give you? He would, if he could, give you a houseful of ornaments; but Mother Lakshmi has not smiled upon him. Don't grumble, *sai*; you should be thankful that you have got such a dear lord of your soul."

"Oh Bagalá! You seem to be in love with my husband! I wish Prajapati had given me your husband, and mine to you."

"Oh, *sai*! What kind of language is that? It is improper language. Whatever husband fate has given you, with him you must be content. It is a great sin to be discontented in such a case."

"You have become a great Pandit, Bagalá! You speak in that manner, only because you know how to read and to write. Forgive me, *sai*, if I have offended you. I am an ignorant woman, like other women."

"I am no Pandit, *sai*. It is true my husband has taught me to read and to write, but I am as

ignorant as you in many things, only I have read a few books from which I have learnt that conjugal happiness does not consist in the abundance of ornaments, but in the union of hearts."

"You are right, Bagalá." I'll try and console myself with what you have just now told me."

Just at this time Sundari, Badan's wife, came to the *ghát* with an earthen kalási at her waist. As most of the women at that time bathing were of higher castes and of superior social standing, she instinctively went to one of the side steps and descended into the water. An elderly woman noticing her said—"I hear, Málati's mother, that your son Govinda is going to get married to Dhanamani, Padma Pál's eldest daughter. Is that rumour true?"

"Yes, there has been some talk on the subject, but nothing has as yet been settled."

"It would be a good match. Dhanamani is a very nice girl. She is gentle like the goddess Lakshmi herself."

"Don't praise her too much, lest the gods take her away from the world. If Prajapati has tied the knot, the marriage will take place; if not, not."

“You need not be anxious about it. Padma Pál seems to have a great liking for your son. I am sure the marriage will take place.”

“So let it be, by the blessing of you all.”

After Sundari had uttered the above words there was observed some excitement amongst the women bathing; several voices at once cried out—“Look there! Hemángini, the zamindár’s daughter, is coming here.” All looked towards the way leading to the *ghát* from the village, when there was seen a very beautiful girl of about sixteen years of age coming up to the bathing place. Her head was uncovered; her body covered in every part with ornaments; she was somewhat stout, and as she walked slowly, like a young elephant, as the old Sanskrit poets would have said, the silver anklets of her feet made a tinkling noise. She had been married some years since to a young zamindár of another part of the district, and was now on a visit to her parents. All eyes were directed towards her. She had no *kalasi* at her waist, was attended by two maid-servants, and looked as proud as, to compare small things with great, Pharaoh’s daughter might

have looked when she went to make her ablution in the Nile. An old woman, who seemed, from a massive gold chain round her neck, to belong to a respectable and wealthy family, broke the silence by asking—"What man was that sitting in the portico of your house with your father? I saw them both as I was coming to the tank."

"That is the Dárogá of Mantresvara."

"Dárogá! Why, what has he come here for? I have not heard of any *dacoity* or murder in the village."

"No murder! Have you forgotten the case of Yádumani, Padma Pál's second daughter?"

"But that is an old affair. It was all settled long ago."

"It was not settled—it was only hushed up. But it seems it has come to light now."

"And what has your father said to the Dárogá."

"I am sure I don't know what he has said to him; but I believe he has given the Dárogá hush-money?"

Some of the women then launched upon a long argument on the merits of the case, some defending the practice of giving hush-money, and others con-

demning it. Such is a sample of the sort of conversation which takes place in the parliament of Bengali women. Other topics of conversation are :—the cruelties of husbands, the quarrels of two wives of the same man, the atrocious conduct of step-mothers, the beauty of the women of the village, and the like. After a world of talk of the above description the women one by one left the *ghát*, almost all of them in clothes dripping wet, and with *kalasis* filled with water on their waist. As no eye is now upon us, let us, gentle reader, come down from the tree and take to our heels, lest some late bathers discover us and beat us with broomsticks for having committed so ungallant an act as to overhear the conversation of ladies.

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